Sulfur 29

NEW TRANSLATIONS OF VALLEJO, ZANZOTTO & LEIRIS
THE POETRY OF PHILIP LAMANTIA
INTRODUCING UNICA ZURN
POETRY BY GUEST, ROTHENBERG, DUPLESSIS,
BARAKA, VIOLI, & REDGROVE

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FALL 1991

A LITERARY BI-ANNUAL OF THE WHOLE ART

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COVER: TERESA SERRANO / DON'T TOUCH ME
Pencil, charcoal & acrylic on canvas, 56" x 48", 1990
(Photo Credit: Mark Sink; reproduced by courtesy of Anne Plumb Gallery, New York City)

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CESAR VALLEJO
TRILCE LX–LXIX

(Tr. from the Spanish by Clayton Eshleman & Julio Ortega)

LX

Of wood is my patience,
deaf, vejetal.

Day you who have been pure, a child, useless,
you were born naked, the leagues
of your march, go running over
your twelve extremities, this frowning fold
that later frays
into who knows what final diapers.

Constellated of grumose hemispheres,
under eternal unknown americas, your great plumage,
you depart and leave me, without your ambiguous emotion,
without your knot of dreams, Sunday.

And my patience is eaten away,
and I turn to exclaim: When will Sunday,
big-mouthed and mute, emerge from the sepulcher;
when will it come to load up this Saturday
of rags, this horrible suture
of the pleasure that begets us accidentally,
and the pleasure that BaniSHEs us.

LXI*

Descending from my horse tonight,
before the door of the house, where
I said farewell with the cock's crowing.
It is shut and no one responds.

The stone bench on which mama enlightened
my older brother, so he could saddle
backs I had ridden bare,
through lanes, past hedges, a country boy;
the stone bench on which I left my heartsick childhood
yellowing in the sun. . . . And this mourning
that frames the portal?

God in alien peace,
the beast sneezes, as if calling too;
noses about, prodding the cobbles. Then doubts
whinnies,
his ears all ears.

Papa must be up praying, and perhaps
he will think I am late.
My sisters, humming their simple,
boisterous illusions,
in preparation for the approaching holy day,
and it's almost here.
I wait, I wait, my heart
an egg at its moment, that blocked.

The numerous family that we left
not long ago, now no one awake, not even a candle
placed on the altar so that we might return.

I call again, and nothing.
We fall silent and begin to sob, and the animal
whinnies, keeps on whinnying.

Asterisks refer to lines noted at the end of this section.

They're all sleeping forever,
and so nicely, that at last
my horse dead-tired starts nodding
in his turn, and half-asleep, with each pardon, says
it's all right, everything is quite all right.

LXII

Carpet
Whenever you go to the room that you know,
enter it, but carefully half-close the screen
that so often is half-open,
tightly unite the hooks, so that other backs
no longer can turn.

Bark
And when you leave, say that you'll not delay
in calling the canal that separates us:
powerfully kaught on an edge of your fate,
I'm inseparable for you,
and you drag me edgeways with your soul.

Pillow
And only when we have died—who knows!
Oh no. Who knows!
then we will have separated.
But if, on changing step, I am handed
the unknown flag, I'll wait for you there,
at the confluence of breath and bone,
as in old times,
as in old times on the corner of the western
bride and groom of the earth.

And from there I'll follow you along
other worlds, and even my mossy
and cold-benumbed nos will serve you,
you may rest your knees on them
on the seven falls of that infinite slope,
and thus they will hurt you less.

LXIII

Day breaks raining. Combed through
morning drips fine hair.
Melancholy is lashed fast;
and on the misasphalted oxident of Hindu furniture,*
veering, destiny hardly settles.

Skies of the puna disheartened
by great love, platinum skies, torvus
with impossibility.

The flock ruminates and is underscored
by an Andean whinny.

I remember myself. But the staves
of the wind suffice, the rudders so still
they appear one,
and the cricket of tedium and the gibbous unbreakable elbow.

The morning suffices with free plaits
of precious, sierran tar,
when I go out and look for eleven o'clock
and it is only an ill-timed twelve.

LXIV

Wandering landmarks enamor, since the mountainous moment
that midwives and dates the insurgent niches of the atmosphere.

The heart is green from so much waiting; and in the Panama
Canal—I'm speaking to you, middles, bases, cusps! stairsteps sprout,
steps going up, steps going dow-
n.
And I who persevere,
and I who know to stand firm.

Oh valley without mother height, where everything sleeps a horrible halftone, without refreshing rivers, without entrances for love. Oh voices and cities that pass galloping on a finger pointed at bald Unity. While pass, from much in much, farmhands with great wise sides, behind the three tardy dimensions.

Today Tomorrow Yesterday

(No, man!)

LXV

Mother, tomorrow I'm going to Santiago,
to dip myself in your blessing and in your tears.
I'm adjusting my self-deceptions and the rosy
sore of my worthless tasks.

Your arch of astonishment will await me,
the tonsured columns of your longings
that exhaust life. The patio will await me,
the downstairs corridor with its tori and festive*

borders. My tutorial armchair will await me,
that solid bigjawed piece of dynastic
leather, that keeps grumbling at great-great-
grandchild rumps, from strap to strand.

I am sifting my purest affections.
I am axling—don't you hear the plummet gasping?*
—don't you hear the revilles pounding?
I am molding your love formula
for all the hollows of this floor.
Oh if only tacit gigs were available
for all the most distant ribbons,
for all the most distinct reunions.

So it is, immortal dead one. So it is.
Under the double arches of your blood, where
one can only pass on tiptoes, even my father
to go through there,
humbled himself until less than half a man,
until being the youngest child that you had.

So it is, immortal dead one.
In the colonnade of your bones
which not even sobs can topple,
and in whose side not even Destiny could intrude
even one of his fingers.

So it is, immortal dead one.
So it is.

LXVI*

The Second of November tolls.

These chairs are truly welkoming.
The branch of forebodings
goes, comes, lifts, flutters sweaty,
wearied in this sitting room.
The Second of November tolls sad.

Souls, how deep your abolished teeth
cut, recrossing blind nerves,
without recalling the tough fiber
that round singing workers are mending
with unending hemp, of innumerable knots
throbbing with crossroads.

You, souls, of the limpid knees
pure from your surrenderings,
how you saw at the other heart
with your white crowns, lacking
in cordiality. Yes. You, souls.

The Second of November tolls sad.
And the branch of forebodings
is bitten by a cart that simply
rolls through the street.

LXVII

Summer sings close by, and both
wander diverse, shouldering
road bends, cedars, uniped rhythms,
legs apart on the inevitable single line.

Summer sings, and on those sweetened
walls of March,
the arachnid aquarelle of melancholy
snivels, swarms.

A painting framed with cracked annelid, a painting
that was missing from that spot where
we thought the large absent mirror should go.
Love, this is the painting that was missing.

But, why exert myself
by gilding straws for such an enchanted auricle,
if, on the back of beloved stars,
emptiness is tolerated, despite everything.

How much mother remained inside
always, in tenacious carbon attire, whenever
the painting was missing, and for what would grow
at the foot of woman's arduous ravine.

So I told myself: yes that mirror will come—
having been so awaited, it's more than crystal now.
My life was running out—to what end?
My life was running out, to raise us

only from mirror to mirror.

LXVIII

It is the Fourteenth of July.
Five in the evening. It's raining all over
a blotting paper third corner.
And it rains more from below ay upward.

Two lagoons the hands advance
ten deep,
out of a swampy Tuesday that has for six days
in the lachrymals been frozen.

A week has slashed its throat
with the sharpest falls; haz done
all that it can to make miserable genial
in a huge tavern without rails. Now we are
ok, given this rain that washes us
and cheers us and evokes our tenderness for it.

We've walked as gross weight, and, with a single
defiance,
our animal purity whitened.
And we ask for eternal love,
for the absolute encounter,
for as much as passes from here to there.
And we responded from wherever mine are not yours,
from whatever moment the staff, on being carried,
supports and is not supported. (The net.)

And my greatcoat, it was black,*
hanging in a corner, not making a peep,
a
t
f
u
l
m
a
s
T

LXIX

How you search for us, oh sea, with your educational
volumes! How inconsolable, how atrocious
you are in the feverish sunshine.

With your mattocks you leap,
with your leaves you leap,
hacking, hacking in a maddened sesame,
while the waves return crying, after
uncalking the four winds
and all memories, on labiate tungsten
platters, contracted with fangs
and transfixed chelonian l's.

Philosophy of black wings vibrating
in the shy tremor of the shoulders of day.

The sea, and an edition standing,
in its single leaf the recto
facing the verso.

A Note On *Trilce*

1922 was a banner year for international modernism. It includes Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Wasteland*, Pasternak's *My Sister, Life*, e.e. cummings' *The Enormous Room*, Valery's *Le cimetière marin*, Rilke's *Duineser Elegien* (completed in 1922, published in 1923), and of course César Vallejo's *Trilce*. This medium-length work (77 poems, about 100 pages) falls somewhere between Joyce's "soup pot as big as the Phoenix Park," and Eliot's "food in tins." In LXI, Vallejo refers to the book as "my succulent snack of unity."

Trilce is Vallejo's second book, and a total departure from the solid but fairly conventional *Los heraldos negros* (1918). A year after *Trilce's* publication, Vallejo left Peru for good, and spent the remaining 15 years of his life for the most part based in Paris, where he wrote the poems posthumously published by his widow as *Poemas humanos* (and now known as "the Paris

poems," or as three separate volumes making up *The Complete Posthumous Poetry* (tr. by Eshleman and Barcia, University of California Press, 1978).

The major pressure in the poems is that of the vise of sex and death. Via certain eating scenes, entangled with elegaic mother sensations and acute erotic registrations, the tomb/womb space of the mother is explored as the body of a lover is caressed and consumed. In its deep structure, *Trilce* achieves its freedom-in-tension by incestuously broaching the wall that divides masculine energy between being a son and being a lover. When such a wall breaks, a new, terrible heaven and hell pervade consciousness.

Trilce is the most radical collection of poetry in the Spanish language, and is not only filled with burned bridges but with intact ones, or: models of what is to be burned. While the most striking writing in the book is involved with fracturing the referential, linear functions of communicative language (in a way that anticipates "projective verse" and "language poetry" by a number of decades), such writing which is juxtaposed with thematic narratives seems at first glance to be written by someone else. Some of Vallejo's accomplishment, then, involves a two-way movement between the inside and the outside, interiors in which the act of writing generates associative webs of words released from temporal and spatial obligations, and exteriors which via sketches of childhood, romance, and political confinement (Vallejo was unjustly jailed for 3 months during the period of the book's composition), establish a life. The exteriors create frames in which an interior freedom is discovered and performed—the losses of experience through which the findings of vision are made possible.

Trilce has not attracted a great deal of attention outside the Spanish-language world of literature because it has not been satisfactorily translated. For the past two and a half years, Julio Ortega (a Peruvian poet and scholar now at Brown University) and I have been attempting to remedy this situation. The Eridanos Library will publish our version (bilingually) in 1992. The following brief notes may be useful for the 10 poems from *Trilce* published in this issue of *Sulfur*. There are some intentional misspellings in the original poems which we have matched in translation.

LXI: Juan Espejo Asturrizaga (whose *César Vallejo, Itinerario del hombre*, Lima, 1965, is the key and virtually only account of Vallejo's Peruvian years) writes that this poem responds to a journey back to Vallejo's home in Santiago de Chuco made by the poet and some friends after he had been away for several years. Espejo recalls: "We made an arduous journey on mule back from Menocucho (the nearest train connection to Trujillo at the time). César's brother, Miguel, was with us. We arrived after a three day ride, entering the town at two in the morning. Everyone was sleeping peacefully, in a delicious silence. At the Vallejo home, we knocked on the door, with

César anxious to embrace his family. We knocked and knocked, and still no one responded. After a long wait, we went inside."

LXIII:

oxidente (oxident): a neologism fusing "Occidente" (Occident) and "oxidar" (to oxidize).

LXV:

tondos (tori): round moldings (torus, in the singular).
ejando (axling): a neologism based on "eje" (axle).

LXVI: Eduardo Neale-Silva suggests that in back of this poem commemorating All Souls Day are the deaths of Vallejo's first sweetheart in Trujillo, María Rosa Sandoval (10 February, 1918), and his mother, María de los Santos Gurrionero (8 August, 1918).

LXVIII: the last thin stanza looks like a flag flying from the pole made by the vertical formation "atodastA," a compression of "a toda asta" (based on the expression "a media asta," at half mast).

—CE / June 1991

BARBARA GUEST
DISSONANCE ROYAL TRAVELLER

sound opens sound

shank of globe strings floating out

something like images are here

opening up avenues to view a dome

a distant clang reaches the edifice.

understanding what it means
to understand music

cloudless movement beyond the neck's reach
an hypnotic lull in porcelain water break mimics
tonality crunch of sand under waddling

a small seizure
from monumentality

does not come or go with understanding

the path will end
birdhouse of trembling cotton

or dream expelled it
parcel on the landlocked moor.

explaining music

and their clothes entangled
who walk into a puddle of minnows;
  minnows in a bowl
consonant with water.

  the drifted footpad
ambushed by reeds signals the listening
oars.

  music disappears into oars.

in the middle the world is brown;
on the opposite side of the earth
an aroma of scarlet.

this accompanies our hearing music;
the sleeve of heaven

and the hoof of earth
loosed from their garrison.

yet dissonance may abandon *miserere*
on bruised knee hasten to the idol.

and what is consonance—the recluse—

entering and exiting
as often as a monarch butterfly
touches a season;

by accident grips the burning flowers.

in the stops between terror
the moon aflame on its plaza.

autumn of rippling wind
and the noise of baskets
smell of tin fists.

and harsh fists
on the waterfall changing the season;
the horse romps in flax
a cardboard feature
creating a cycle of flax.

music imagines this cardboard

the horse in cardboard jacket
flagrant the ragged grove

red summit red.

dissonance royal traveller

altered the gray saddle.

JEROME ROTHENBERG
THE LORCA VARIATIONS XI & XII

THE LORCA VARIATIONS (XI)
"NEWTON"

1
The men had green feet that vaulted them into the open where they could flaunt their secrets. Lace brushed lightly against their nostrils as the apple tree loomed over Newton with its fruits. It is so Saxon to bind gnomes with string, to watch your echoes drifting off in secret, your lost companions jangling irons in the wind. Not every boy has such sad eyebrows, nor would every corner spare an inch for death. In the woods the moon showed Newton where the truth lies. Following his nose he slammed into a meteor named Newton. He mistook it for a science that was white—like beech trees or like beards—but once he caught it in his mirror, saw it turn blue again. At length it looked like every other star or lake.

2
Every wise man considers himself another Newton: a philosopher musing beside trees & water, going for a walk or coming from a walk, pulling genies out of waves & sky (with which *sigh* makes a perfect rhyme). Their corneas are focused on infinity & disregard the lowly cricket just as Newton did. And just as Newton knew the wind or Wordsworth knew a certain road to be the night's reflection, so apples floating on a wave of crickets make a synthesis more powerful than stars. Philosophers should play guitars, then, reaching for those apple branches where the moon's a lowly apple. Pyramids adorned with owls express a kind of harmony; & stars are dots & are a proof of death more powerful than worms. What if the river strikes a pose? the cedar will show a face that brings it home.

3
There isn't a clue that the fruit into which Adam bit was an apple & not his lady's breast. Above them Pegasus kept flying past, all in the name of science. The Virgin handed him a second apple, which Adam turned into

a questioning of history. Deep in its core the Virgin saw souls rise & fall: a symbol Newton later found inside a pomegranate. Only a child can play with apples & touch beauty; Newton & Adam both were satisfied with Eve's reply, the first she gave when she woke up in chains, her innocence laid by. Paris in the other tale held up an orange.

THE LORCA VARIATIONS (XII)
"FEDERICO, NEWTON, ADAM"

1

Federico in Paris writing about Newton's soul without a clue to what it is.

Federico bites into a pippin, rotten to the core, the symbol of himself as Adam.

Federico with an orange & a pomegranate that the Virgin hands him from a bowl of fruit.

With his childlike innocence Federico raises age-old questions of the meaning of the apple.

Federico in the chains of history compares his apples to a pair of breasts.

The first truth Federico gets to see is Beauty's, the second is a Pegasus dressed up as Science.

Federico & Newton stand next to Adam & Eve. The Virgin hands Adam an apple & they all await Federico's reply.

2

Federico makes the pyramids his home as long as there are apples left to eat.

Three owls visit Federico in the night & greet him as the wise man in the cedars.

Federico discovers Newton's face reflected on the moon.

Federico standing on the road is posing with an apple & a glass of water.

Where the river branches Federico waits with Wordsworth like a pair of old philosophers.

Federico spots a worm in his apple & a wind in his trees.

Federico takes Newton for a walk & hears Death plucking a guitar.

Federico thinks his walk with Newton is proof that he's a philosopher.

Federico hears the sighs of genies & the crickets in the stars.

Federico conceives a synthesis in which infinity & waves become a single dot.

Federico's cornea sees stars & crickets covering the sky.

Federico thinks the sighs the waves make teach him harmony & rhyme.

3

Federico is sailing on the lake just as a wind comes up.

A green star lodges in Federico's eyebrows, which amazes his companions.

Federico repaints the Blue Boy with a pair of iron feet.

Federico moves two mirrors from their secret corner & sets them in the open.

Federico delivers the men with beards to Death, then listens for their echoes.

Federico wanders through the woods, where gnomes in beechtrees are exchanging secrets.

Beneath a perfectly white moon Federico flutters strings of lace.

Federico hears Newton breathing science through his Saxon nostrils.

Riding on a meteor Federico spots the truth beneath a fruit tree.

Taking the apple Newton hands him, Federico shoves it under Newton's nose.

DUBRAVKA DJURIC
DISORDERING

(Tr. from the Serbo-Croatian by the Author & Charles Bernstein)

1

Lackadaisical paradox drowns itself
imagines eats stares
same's same always and now
later is what's left on table
mother and father later's same
knows it's happening haphazardly
with plain want hurtling at
so am shutting shutters
to shower on fire later freezes itself

2

Not a wish—fear of flower
wilted faded mole moldering
from a one to ones multitude
is here from semen (things) thing in mind
magnitude
wish's wish dries, breaks
if is only lonely in doubt
same's in empty room
silence.

3

Simply spit out name's names
I give myself to names not apparently in
words names' letters gave for names
my names in you spit out.

4

Later every day follows the day inside
upsidedown on floors between doors upsidedown
once happened but not again when it's
upsidedown later everyday is

5

Don't ask questions in brackets among
rows of trees /among rows of trees/ in tedious rhythm
monotonous queries down the hill but only
to see rows like the reflection of wish and want like
circling in circles a sentence behind and in front is and
it is because continuity
word on word leans in meaning and symbolically
removed from that side behind or in front
above or below the same is.

PHILIP LAMANTIA

PASSIONATE ORNITHOLOGY IS ANOTHER KIND OF YOGA

Thirty feisty finches at the window FINCHDOM
Four or five double-tufted crowns
Midsummer Spring born
most daring of the lot clumsy but quick
at our plastic feeder tray
Beata framed nude at a door
points her Jupiter finger: Rarely seen
a White-crowned sparrow gets blown away
by these non-Kropotkin red yellow
silver orange birds
They're mean
never give any sparrow (though higher
on the taxonomic tree) even a mite's chance
to beak powder flecks finches drop
while scarfing up their hulled sunflower seeds

•

Glass shadows a suprasensual object
become a secret shuttle
down an escalator going simultaneously up
'the one and only god' found
from that dawn and night on the Nile
space
where all ends in a beginning
Amenti
mutating roseate to indigo tint
behind the darkening horizon
Over to the River's other side
my hidden eye of Horus sights

one old jazz record repeated
myriad nights & days
on a plane gathering Bird and Mozart
distant Vivaldi, wild music of
contrasting flowers whose tones
interject this Ohlonian Spring of
superfinches I love more than to become a star
Ah visible angels of superior affectivity
with the most perfect language of sight
The chosen Red-plumed seeder
ritually feeding the Silver-lined
and a chorus of them form
an unpremeditated Pentacle of erotic song

•

So few of us
if the seed be
become scythe, its own end
as wheaten being
germinates a songbird's septule form
We, too, were once avian
bridge—window—to another life
So they do know us
though now in terror
A few listen with attention—
instant Ornithos, rare
flashing cordial of communicating grace—
who see what I imagine they become
Their gestures speak with deep silence,
flying hearts, before they take off
and primordial gnosis takes flight
to carry seeded mandibles on the wind
who are clothed in primary colors
range, breadth and tones of what
red streamed from
Then, branching leaves envelope
perching forms beneath
a swathe of indigo

JODY NORTON

DESTROYED WORKS: Philip Lamantia's Excessive Subjectivities

Here is a hot wind of knives
cutting my breath for sport,
and leaving behind a limpid song
heard by a million murdered stars.

Balls of arson charge a flood of rats
going down to pray with the blizzard
bone
and the sound burns through a tower,
the highest light of forbidden magic.
—Philip Lamantia, "The Ruins"

The aim of the devil is regression.
—J. E. Cirlot,
A Dictionary of Symbols

Amidst the various and complex rewritings Surrealism has incurred in contemporary American poetry, Philip Lamantia's work stands out as the most powerful, and dangerous, violation of the rule of the self—a violation to which neither Breton and Soupault nor, later, Artaud were ever unequivocally able to subscribe.

Surrealism is an anti-discipline of the mind. However, it is not always clear to Breton—for whom "the marvelous is always beautiful" (14)—that to bypass the ego's defenses against the return of the repressed is to risk unleashing a nonspecific aggressivity that may act itself out not only on the other ("The simplest Surrealist act consists of dashing down into the street, pistol in hand, and firing blindly, as fast as you can pull the trigger, into the crowd" [Breton 125]), but within and against the self.

Lamantia's destroying works produce exactly such a carnivalesque violence. Yet if the most general aim of his poetry is "pure" violation—of the grammar of consciousness (the structures of language and logic), and of the social syntax of law, taboo, gender and symbolic function—its single most dominant motivation is the death of the "death"-of-the-child that is the ego.

Lamantia is conventionally grouped with the San Francisco Renaissance poets of the 1950s—Jack Spicer, Lew Welch, Robert Duncan, et al. A specifically literary context for him in contemporary American poetry is much harder to find. There is no doubt that French surrealism has had an enormous effect on contemporary American poetry. In trickling down through layers of linguistic and cultural debris, however, surrealist poetics has more often been styled than studied. The undomesticated surrealist imagination finds its way into print far less often than highly controlled work frosted with "surreal" verbal effects.

Even more profoundly imaginative American appropriations of surrealism seem only distantly related to Lamantia's work. There are, for example, surrealist moments in the work of James Wright and Robert Bly, partially enabled by their translations of Georg Trakl, and of Latin American surrealists such as Pablo Neruda. Yet the "Deep Image" poets are far closer textual relations of Jung than of Breton.

John Ashbery has been nominated as the chief exemplar of one major "strand of contemporary poetic diction. . .deriving mainly from the French surrealist tradition" (Holden 59). Ashbery's mature poetry, however, most often displays a style which is not only disjunctive, but simultaneously reflective and discursive in a way that Breton and Soupault's *The Magnetic Fields*, for example, never is. Ashbery's problems are those of Heidegger and Derrida: time, being, language and the self. "Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror" is, above all, a poem of acute consciousness; as such, while its game shares certain objectives with the language game of surrealism, it does not play on the same field.

Poets as diverse as Robert Kelly (author of "Notes on the Poetry of Deep Image," a key theoretical statement calling for creative openness to the unconscious), Jerome Rothenberg, Clayton Eshleman, and John Cage share affinities with Lamantia in various ways. But Lamantia is, finally, *sui generis* in American letters. And it may be the very particularity of his project, together with the difficulties of interpretation it poses, that account for his having been almost entirely ignored in the critical literature.[1]

> *I believe in the future resolution of . . .dream and reality, which are seemingly so contradictory, into a kind of absolute reality, a* surreality, *if one may so speak.*
>
> —André Breton,
> "Manifesto of Surrealism"

In the quotation above, Breton might be responding to the central psycho-ontological question of Surrealism, as posed by Ferdinand Alquié: "Does imagination create a real that is proper to it? Does it express a real unknown to us?" (Alquié 125). The answers to these questions are "yes," and "yes."

In the first "Manifesto of Surrealism," André Breton acknowledges borrowing from Freud's psychoanalytic technique—which he had himself used in medical practice during the First World War—to obtain from himself a kind of freely associative, or automatic, text that could draw unconscious contents into consciousness by means of the shared medium of language. The text was to take the form of

> a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to *spoken thought.* (Breton 23)

This automatic writing would be "formed in the zone of psychic activity whence arise instinctive impulses, primordial images, dreams" (Robert Bréchon, qtd. in Chénieux-Gendron 55), and would thus articulate pleasures, antipathies and desires that *should never have been mentioned,* were matters left up to the ego-consciousness.

Breton insists on "the absence of any control exercised by reason" (Breton 26) as a *sine qua non* for Surrealism. Yet because language itself is always in one sense "reasonable," in that it constitutes a coherent order of representation, it is impossible for poetry, whatever the source of its motivations or the method of its linguistic choices, ever fully to divorce itself from structure and the limitations that accompany structural differentiation. Semantic value, after all, even if it is prerational, supra-rational or irrational, depends on social systematicity. There can be no private language, as Wittgenstein showed.

In Philip Lamantia's poetry we are therefore forced to conceive of two levels of voice, in dialogic relation. We are addressed by the secondary, post-oedipal voice of the poet/speaker. But we hear the fragmentary, mirror-stage "voice" of what Lacan calls the subject of the unconscious. The voice of this subject, signified in language, is itself a chaotic chorus of unauthorized voices: a heteroglossia, or better, a heteroglossolalia—a speaking in tongues of the unconscious. To return to Alquie's questions, the "unknown" real of the subject's desire is expressed, through verbal association, as "a real that is proper to it."

the characteristic of the subject of the unconscious is that of being. . .at an indeterminate place.

—Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*

The most general aim of Lamantia's mirror-stage subject is to oppose selfhood by destroying, or transcending, the ego structure constitutive of identity. "I meet you in the solitude of violence," Lamantia writes, in "You flee into a corridor of stars" (*Erotic* 3). This "you" does not specify any kind of external object, but an internal other. In effect, the speaking voice is articulating the antipathy of the subject of the unconscious *to the structure of the voice itself*—that is, to the ego, which hears the voice as its own (inexplicable) intention. The thrown voice of the dummy comes out of the ventriloquist's own mouth, suggesting death to his face.

In the following passage from "Break of Day," the aim of violence is to restore the subject to an uninhabited liquidity. Yet this restoration can take place, in poetry, only through a conflicted, double-voiced Symbolic that unifies, systemically (i.e., syntactically and semantically) what it disperses fantasmatically.

> After the knives have flashed
> And the pool of blood has made
> Its imprint of flowers on the street
> The aimless wanderers, the busy and unbusy,
> Break in air like splinters of ice.
>
> Ashes, like stars, fall into the sewers.
> A bird, hatched no longer than a second,
> Falls from its nest
> Fated for no other wings than death. (*Touch* 57)

The "imprint of flowers" made by the pool of blood is the imprint of an absent self—a print which *declares* the absence of the original. After violence—"After the knives have flashed"—the formations of subjectivity ("aimless wanderers") can break up. "Splinters of ice" expresses both the fragility of self-structure and its modal character: ice, after all, is only a provisional, and particularly rigid, form of something prior which possesses far greater mobility. In the second strophe, the infantile ego, emblematized by the newly-hatched bird is, in the subject's wish, "Fated for no other wings than death."

Lamantia's first book, *Erotic Poems,* was published in 1946, by Bern Porter of Berkeley. It is already accomplished—so much so that many of the poems have been republished twice, in *Touch of the Marvelous* and *Selected Poems 1943-1966.* Poems like "Mirror and Heart," "I am a criminal when your body is bare upon the universe," "Infernal Landscape," "Moments of Exile," "Hermetic Bird," "The mermaids have come to the desert"—all reprinted in *Touch of the Marvelous*—remain among his most characteristic and accomplished poems.

"The mermaids have come to the desert" combines the sexual impulses of *Erotic Poems*—attributable to the constructed and cathected ego of the speaker—with the infantile disintegrative drives that are typical of Lamantia's later work more fully than any other poem in the book. The three central strophes follow:

> I am touched by the marvellous
> As the mermaids' nimble fingers go through my hair
> That has come down forever from my head
> To cover my body:
> A savage fruit of lunacy
>
> Behold, the boudoir is flying away
> And I am holding onto the leg of the lovely one
> Called beneath the sea
> BIANCA
> She is turning
> With the charm of a bird
> Into two giant lips
> As I drink from the goblet of suicide
>
> She is the angelic doll turned black
> She is the child of broken elevators
> She is the curtain of holes you never want to throw away
> She is the first woman and the first man
> And I am lost to have her (25)

Bianca, the only woman named in *Erotic Poems,* is one of the mermaids—that is, she is beautiful but monstrous. "I am touched by the marvellous," the speaker intones, "As the mermaids' nimble fingers go through my hair"—hair which is a "fruit of lunacy."

This intertwining of monstrous fingers and mad hair moves, in the next strophe, into a closer conjoining of speaker and female figure. The suggestion of sexual union in "I am holding onto the leg of the lovely one" shifts into the more ambiguous image of Bianca as "two giant lips," "As I drink

from the goblet of suicide." The lips, as signifiers, seem to float between Bianca and the speaker, between her vulva and his mouth. As these four lips join, the decathecting "death" of sex makes of the entrance to life a "goblet of suicide."

The final strophe is a litany of entropic states: colorlessness, stasis, nothingness, androgyny, and the zero degree of identity. Only the "first woman," whose name is writ large (BIANCA) can locate this all-inclusive dis-integration—only m(Other).

Lamantia' s second book, *Ekstasis,* wasn't published until 1959, though the poems were "written between 1948 and 1958," according to the prefatory note. In the same note Lamantia writes, "My object is a revelation, in manifestation, of beauty—its world, natural or supernatural." The poems express an "exterior interior and personal vision—erotic, mythic, magical and devotional." As the title suggests, Lamantia is trying to locate ecstasy—spiritually, psychologically and poetically.

The search for an ecstatic stasis is broached in diverse ways. The first page of the text proper presents a concrete poem titled "Christ" in the shape of a cross. There are poems addressing the Virgin ("Ah Blessed Virgin Mary / pray for me I live in you"), and proclaiming that "Christ IS the marvellous." Other poems invoke myth ("I think of you, Land of Weir"), drugs ("Opium / in a butterfly's dream"), and "legends, ghosts, haunters /. . . / art, life, death." But these diffuse approaches read, for the most part, like conscious wishes for unconscious desires. "I see you, my soul in a vision SAVED," Lamantia's speaker announces in "Fragments from an Aeroplane"—but it is the assertion we get rather than the vision.

The following lines from "Intersection," one of the poems reprinted in *Selected Poems,* stand out because they are generated not through attention to externals, but from the depths of their speaker's unconscious:

> An old look follows me thru the town
> a look of daggers and autumn winds
> a look that betrays where it came from in a pool
> at my feet

This look is the gaze of an other, a double which betrays its formal presence within me in the "pool at my feet." This mirror gaze of the ego is "a look of daggers," because it represents the wish for my "death" in a fictional stabilization. This look is always "An old look," in that it freezes the temporal process of being in a moment behind which stands the procession of fathers whose Law requires, and constitutes, the self as difference.

fuck yr safety, WHO NEEDS IT?
— Philip Lamantia, "I Demand
Extinction of Laws Prohibiting
Narcotic Drugs!"

Narcotica, also published in 1959 at the height of the Beat Movement, is a polemic against drug laws. Four poems romanticizing drug use accompany the title essay, and are followed by a section of translations from Artaud's writings on opiates and their virtues.

Artaud's relevance for Lamantia is real. But despite the intertextual collaboration of Lamantia with Artaud in *Narcotica,* as his co-author, translator, and political ally, this relevance has little to do with the existential and/or poetic virtues of drug-induced altered states. It has a great deal to do with Artaud's views on poetics, and with his poetic concerns.

The chief of these relevances is Artaud's commitment to what he calls "surrealist danger" ("Letter to André Breton"). This danger is really a double one. At the generative level, the danger of surrealism is loss of the boundaries that establish one's hold on "reality," through sex, ecstasy, poetry, madness or death. To inhabit this space of unreason is Artaud's aim.

At the restrictive level, danger, for surrealism, lies in the reduction and rigidification of meaning by institutions (churches, madhouses, art galleries), systems (heterosexuality, writing), and thought itself ("don't think that you can get me to discuss [everything], and that while discussing I will forget myself and that I will thus begin, without realizing it, to THINK," Artaud warns [Auster 263]).

In "Letter to André Breton," Artaud complains that the astrological motif and initiatory rhetoric of the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition, in which Breton has invited him to participate, is at once mystificatory and constraining, and goes on to express his fear that such a false carnivalization of surrealism will confirm the already formed opinion of "the great bourgeois masses," that they are now safely "mithridatized against the mere idea of surrealist danger." The danger, from Artaud's perspective, is that there will *be* no danger.

It is you who are coming—Beautiful
Destruction!
—Philip Lamantia, "Apocamantica"

Destroyed Works (1962) is apocalyptic, hieratic, visionary. The poetics of self-destruction in Lamantia's poetry involves a series of parallel modes of imagery, each a metaphoric displacement of the others: sadistic, masochistic, ecstatic, and psychotropic. The poems in *Destroyed Works* act out a

compulsion to make a destroyed work of the "I." They court extremity: cannibalism ("it is enough to have eaten bourgeois testicles"); ordure ("shit spirit even perfect shit is a corpse"); drugs ("morphine is equivalent to the apotheosis of cannibal motherhood"). "I am coming out of myself," as Lamantia writes in "Morning Light Song"—violently, ecstatically, excrementally.

The wish to fragment the unity of the ego is especially clear in the series of images of shattered mirrors and broken glass. "I give you the mirror to crumble by," the speaker says to "Diana Invertrex," a masochistic inversion of himself, in "Crab." One passes *back* through the mirror stage, in Lamantia's poems, by smashing the identity-forming looking glass: "There's an infinite plasterboard room of Glass Black / thru this infinite room my face falls into bits" ("Till the End of Time").

Touch of the Marvelous (1966) reprints twenty-one of the twenty-nine poems in *Erotic Poems,* and adds fifteen titles. It is perhaps Lamantia's single most memorable book. All of the best poems from *Erotic Poems* are included, as well as several remarkable new pieces ("The Diabolic Condition," "The Ruins," "Descent," "Inside the Journey").

The anti-narcissism, and the motifs of violence, are those of *Erotic Poems.* In this book, however, the presence of generalized female others is less conspicuous, and the violence of desire takes on a more masochistic, and occasionally homoerotic, tinge, as in the line "I become ready to offer myself to the smooth red snakes / entwined in the heads of sorcerers" (28).

The touch of the marvelous is bloody. Whereas just over half the republished poems (eleven of twenty-one) mention blood or bleeding, eleven of the fifteen new poems do; and each of the other four includes knives or wounds. Blood emblematizes Lamantia's subject's desire to destruct the self in three ways. First of all, it is fluid, and Lamantia's subject is in search of an originally fluid, pre-egoic subjectivity. The fact that blood is *the* fluid that determines and facilitates the relation between life and death adds to its symbolic potency ("O the mirror-like dirt / of freshly spilt blood" [20]).

Secondly, blood is a metonym for aggressivity: in addition to wounds, slashings and cuttings are fantasized. The book is, in Roget's marvelous phrase, a "saturnalia of blood" (Mawson 135).

Finally, there is a pattern of specifically masochistic images. According to J. E. Cirlot, "The single rose is, in essence, a symbol of completion, of consummate achievement and perfection" (275). It may represent "the mystic Centre, the heart. . .the beloved," and so on (275). In "The Diabolic Condition," the self becomes "my rose spitting blood"—that is, a "beloved" for whom death is imagined/wished.

Some of these masochistic images pass through the symbolic structure of castration. "As a rose runs down an alley, a purple nugget, giving off some

blood, is suspended in air," Lamantia writes in "A Civil World" (cf. "the phallic rose," *Selected* 73).

Selected Poems: 1943–1966 (1967) includes nine poems from *Erotic Poems*, seven poems from *Ekstasis*, eight from *Destroyed Works*, nine from *Touch of the Marvelous* (not counting the nine reprinted from *Erotic Poems*, which also appear in *Touch*) and fifteen new poems, of which "Coat of Arms" is the most memorable.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud speculates that *"an instinct is an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things"* (30). The logical conclusion of this line of thought is that *"the aim of all life is death"* (32). Lacan rewrites the death instinct as desire for the m(Other)—that is, desire to return to the pre-oedipal state of indifferentiation. The concluding section of "Coat of Arms" prophesies the accomplishment of just such a return:

> To let loose a room's inner skeleton
> I come from far places
> dressed in the explosions of green lamps
> It's the moment before arson
> Taught not to look back
> my fires drink a porous stone
> The geyser speaks
> at the house of the onyx mirror
> My name is augur
> these lips besmirch the dawn
> My sword's a vaporous cloud
> The tooth marks of ecstasy
> wear the look of totems
> and the dragon's vermouth tongue
> Every arm is bathed in silver blood
> I read the spells of Egypt patiently (*Selected* 97)

The first four lines announce the subject's motivation (to "let loose" the endoskeleton of the mind), its origin ("far places"), and the imminence of its effects ("It's the moment before arson"). Though the subject has been "Taught not to look back" by the ego, through the mechanism of repression, nevertheless "The geyser speaks."

"My name is augur"—not a personal name, then, but a double position: on the one hand augur, or prophet, on the other, a drill ("A piercing Augur to search into the bowels of the earth" [Plat, qtd. in *OED*, Compact ed. 141]). Together these positions suggest an ambiguous function: drilling (into earth, into mother, with all the sadistic sexuality of that image) as the return to the underworld on which prophecy depends. And just as the augur is

nameless, his prophecy will be opaque ("the onyx mirror"), lacking distinction. "My sword"—the Law of the Name of the Father—is now "a vaporous cloud." "The tooth marks of ecstasy" again identify the desired goal as the loss, through erotic violence, of boundaries. To read "the spells of Egypt patiently" is to visualize ancient (infantile/primordial) glyphs as a way back to the magical freedom of Imaginary being.

The Blood of the Air was published by Donald Allen's Four Seasons Foundation in 1970. The poems in Part 1, "The Libran Age," are surrealist love poems addressed to an unnamed "you." "I touch you" uses its title as a refrain to express a passionate (blood) relation. Lamantia uses a declarative symbolism ("I touch you with heart strings of the veiled mountain") for an atypically other-directed, sensual aim ("whose magnetic moment is the sight of us making love" [3]).

In Part 2, a new form of self-dissolution—the breakdown of semantic values—comes into play. "I'm vanishing like vanishing letters," Lamantia writes in "Flaming Teeth." There is no sentence punctuation in this poem, and independent clauses run on into other independent clauses, or phrases, without distinction. Syntactic positions are shared, as in "A succession of literary images cabalas insecticides," where the object of the preposition "of" can be any one of the three following common nouns. The relation is *not* diachronic, as "images, cabalas, and insecticides" would be, but synchronic: one chooses from among exchangeables.

The following passage from the prose poem "World Without End" exemplifies the semantic openness of the "Flaming Teeth" poems:

> Newspapers disappear, current vices appear as smoke tissues salute the bodies of the enlightened before the past began to draw the curtain of dust on the total eclipse my contemporaries imagine. I am beginning to eat light, straight *and of the corner stone* sprung up, grail-of-the-betel-lady, swinger of the nymph conch veiled with the pest, thunderwing who comes clothed with high noon. I vanish to start the sun to roll its eyes from the subterranean chant that is and knows no name, Mystery of the clock that prunes the transmutative glance Look out of weir window and glyph god from under the vomit's shield. (44)

This paragraph is comprised so heavily of abstractions and symbolist "images" that it is very difficult to retain either as idea or image. As in language poetry, in which traditional poetic figurative, imagic and narrative controls are systematically disrupted, one reads this passage with a radical semantic freedom.

> The alienation of the ego always has as its corollary a sacrifice: *the sacrifice of the truth of ourselves. . . . Man devotes himself to his own death and consummates it in the movement whereby he seeks to assert himself in the social and cultural world. . . . One could say that, as the ego proliferates in form, it becomes limited in being.*
>
> —Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*

Becoming Visible (1981) looks back over the themes of the necessary return ("*all the children are necrophiles at bay*"[50]), and of the poem as the vehicle of destruction ("the poem becomes an open sluice for darkness" [27]). The opening section of "Life Sciences" combines these thematics in a few graceful lines:

> Open the mirage that calls you
>
> The wind's embalming fluid
> and the deserted shadow
> originating the flaw at outposts
> dovetailed
> into the transparent substance
> the absence of water
> turned around in the mirrors (66)

The "mirage" of the "I" does call the subject, and because it exerts a certain tentative attraction, it must be opened before the possibility of unity becomes a determination. The wind, without any unique materiality of its own, consisting merely of something else in motion, yet powerfully desiccating, is coupled with "the deserted shadow"—the mirror-stage form-without-content that originates "the flaw" (the allusive difference). "Fluid" and "shadow" are "dovetailed / into the transparent substance / the absence of water."

The speaker is driven to fantasize a substantive "absence"—one capable of being "turned around in the mirrors"—which, like water and the pre-egoic infantile mind, could serve to instantiate, not a fictional figure of the self (à la Narcissus) but blankness—the *lack* of such determination.

These lines, after the first, are syntactically immobile. They form a sentence without a predicate. In effect, nothing is said—and of course, the satisfaction of arriving at nothing is precisely the subject's aim. The mirage

of the text has disappeared, after representing itself as a transparency, and the shadow of the "I" has been, in Keats' words, "suitably sublimed."

> *In the unconscious nothing can be brought to an end, nothing is past or forgotten.*
>
> —Sigmund Freud,
> *The Interpretation of Dreams*

To write poetry—to textualize desire—is for Lamantia "the beginning of the flower / inside it's black ore I salute abyss after abyss" (*Destroyed).* Because nature abhors a vacuum, the de-creative accomplishment of nothing must be periodically reenacted, lest *something* take its place. Lamantia's subject must produce and reproduce, in language, its own dispersal as "it"—or more precisely, "its" nonentity—becomes "me," through the repeated shattering of the mirror in which the self continually reforms. "Death" itself, then, becomes repetitive rather than absolute: new life evokes new death, in a transumptive cycle. From this perspective, life and death are equally excessive—they go beyond what is, to what is not.

The poems of *Meadowlark West* (1986), Lamantia's most recent book, are excessive in this sense. Their excess is, like that of Lamantia's earlier poems, motivated by a perception of structure as fixity, and therefore as a confinement that denies both life and death. But the mode now is a Shelleyan transcendence, whose freedom is still that of the Surrealist imagination, but also that of a collective multi-cultural and biophysical unconscious. The emblematic "sur-rational" voice of this pre-conscious matrix of creativity, for Lamantia as for Shelley, is the "Hermetic Bird."

In the beginning—in the "Methuselan myths"—was "avian anarchia" (42). Like God, birds are present at the origin, and it is they who—also like God—chant chaos into the harmonic beauty of being:

> the Chanty Bird sings in amber street light predawn
> song the automatistic weaving worthy of Neith the
> ancient Egyptian Neter She Who Weaves the World
> ("Spring")

This act of creation, however, is a musical play of being, not an abstract law. It is "automatistic" only in that, like automatic writing, it escapes the control of consciousness. Its repetitions are melodic, pleasurable, not rigidifying.

Lamantia's project, in *Meadowlark West,* is to create a poetry that will continue to touch the "many centers of mystic geography" (22), as both Indian chants and bird songs do. The would-be poet must become "the

winged heart which is bird" (57), so that "my eyes are yours Great Blue Heron" (43), my pleasures "the pleasures of writing you invisible telegraph of nature" (43).

> Only man and the bird are divine. Coasting on folds of air, the White-tailed Kite meets its mate, the great sun of love, between the paint of feathers. . . . The vision situates who we are like an oracle of another world. Whoever meets the sudden revel seers the earth's renewal. ("Ship of Seers")

"Poetry is for birds" (32), and Lamantia is Meadowlark West, "a man / becoming bird" (18), whose "oppositions of delicate harmony" (12), whose "green speech" (14), will echo "Between the ecstasy and the secret" (2).

Meadowlark West is not devoid of the tropes of darkness so familiar from earlier books like *Becoming Visible* and *Destroyed Works*. "The mind is a black hole of beautiful chance encounters" (9), the speaker intones, in "West": "the joker leaps at the hole" (8). To dream of mind as a black hole is transparently to fantasize annihilation: heaven becomes "the lost paradise a black hole" (64). In *Meadowlark West,* however, if mortality is "a plane of pitfalls" (29), it is also the space of "Poetry magic love liberty" (24), from which "The impossible is easy to reach" (1).

> after death poetry shall have its morning of birds
> whose shimmering green light baffles and prates
> precisely as [t/o]
> germinating vessels
> what escapes pulses the earth's cascade
> that falls upward in a multiverse of shattered shells ("Fourth of July")

After rigor, after immobility, poetry will enable the free mixture of sensation, germination, articulation. This pulsing cascade of vitality will not sink "Downward to darkness, on extended wings" (Stevens 8), but will fall "upward in a multiverse of shattered shells." Where "shattered shells" in *Selected Poems* would have stressed the destruction of form, here the context suggests egg shells, burst through a sheer creative force which will exceed the gravitational attraction of death, the black hole, and speak "upward," with "the great booming voice of nature" (70).

> *Out of gather silence gathers*
> —Philip Lamantia, "Haven Root"

"At the still point / of infinite sur-rational flight" (70), "poetry is wedded to silence," Lamantia writes (37). But if we return finally, in *Meadowlark West,* to silence, it is not to dead silence—to death as negation—but to silence as the tone without which the complex harmonies of life cannot be heard. The poetry which "breaks" this silence does so not in anger, but in joy—singing, celebrating the unfinalizability of being.

> Teach us, Sprite or bird,
> What sweet thoughts are thine;
> . . . . . .
>
> Waking or asleep,
> Thou of death must deem
> Things more true and deep
> Than we mortals dream,
> Or how could thy notes flow in such a chrystal stream?
> (Shelley, "To a Sky-Lark")

Notes

[1]The *MLA Bibliography* lists no articles on Philip Lamantia. The only substantive discussion of his poetry of which I am aware occurs in Paul Zweig's article "The New Surrealism," which is now almost twenty years old. Zweig writes: "Of all the American poets to whom surrealism has mattered, only one, Phillip Lamantia [sic], has created a body of work which reflects the intensity and the original ambition of the French poets" (280). Lamantia is also mentioned briefly in Breslin, Davidson, Perkins, and Ross.

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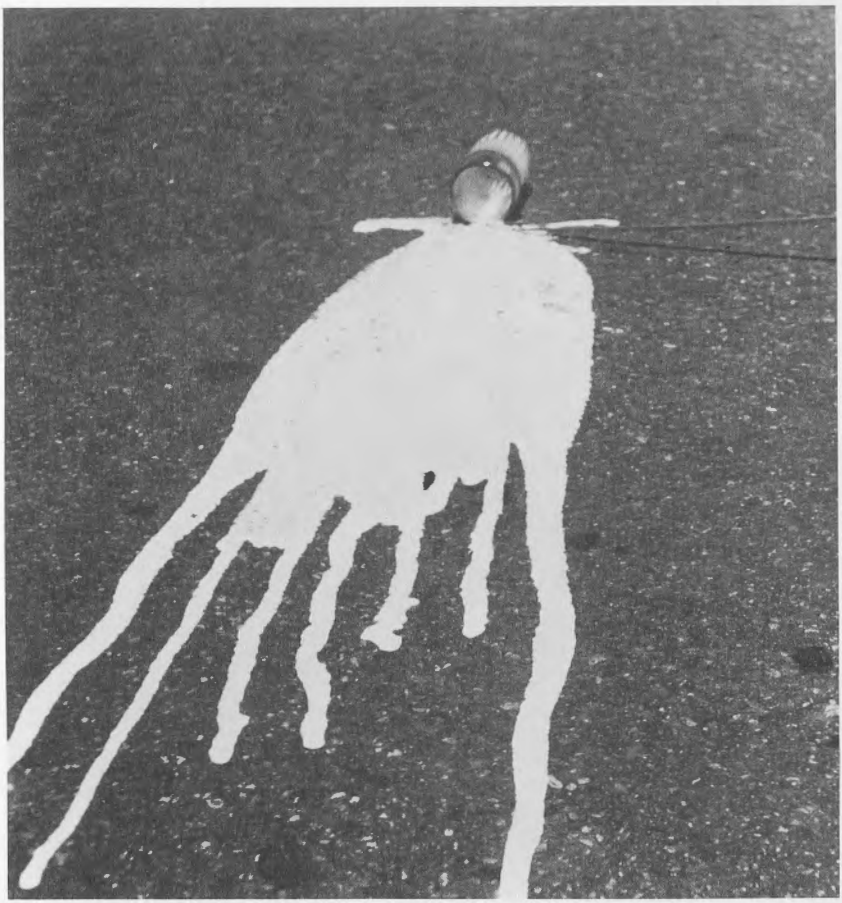
CECILIA VICUNA
FIVE WORKS

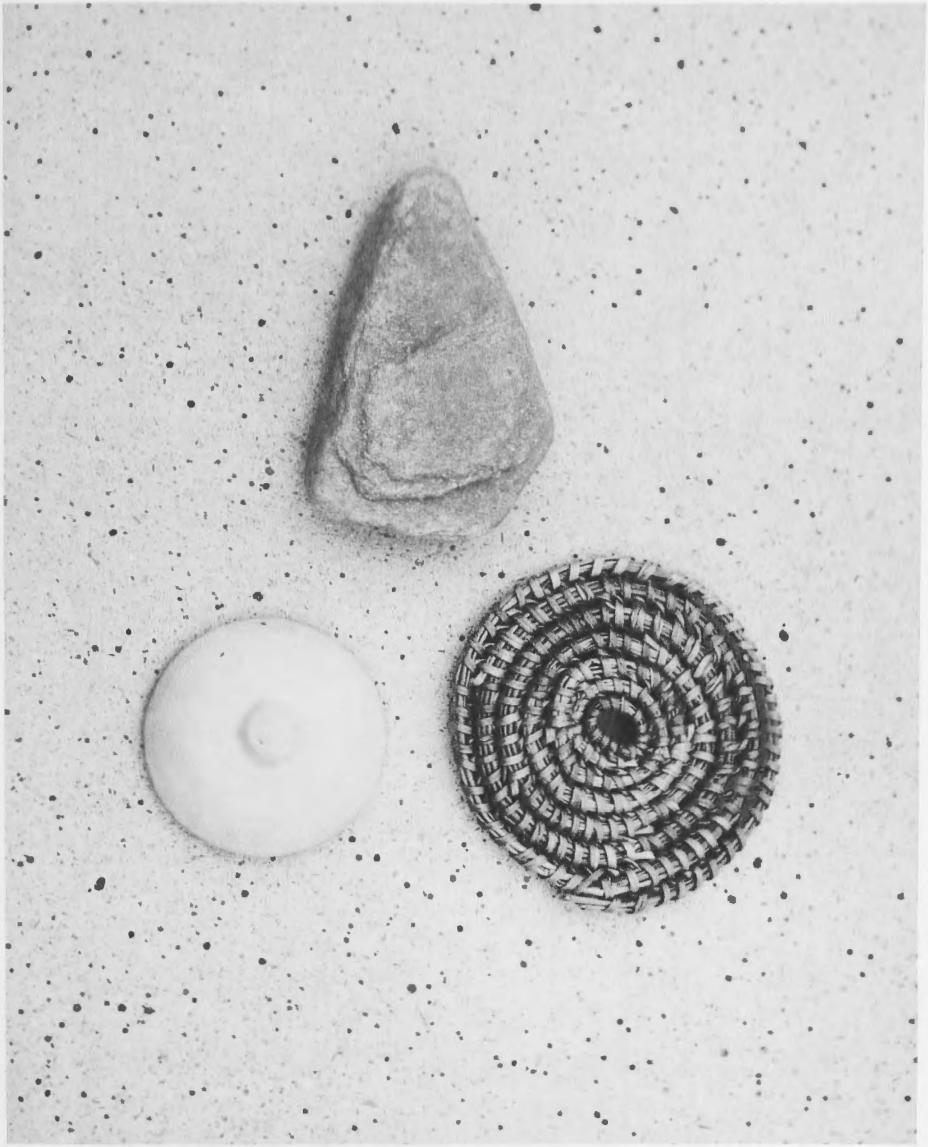
LA FALDA DE LA MOMIA

New York City, 1989
(Photo: John Paniker)



VASO DE LECHE II

Bogotá, 1979
(Photo: Oscar Monsalve)

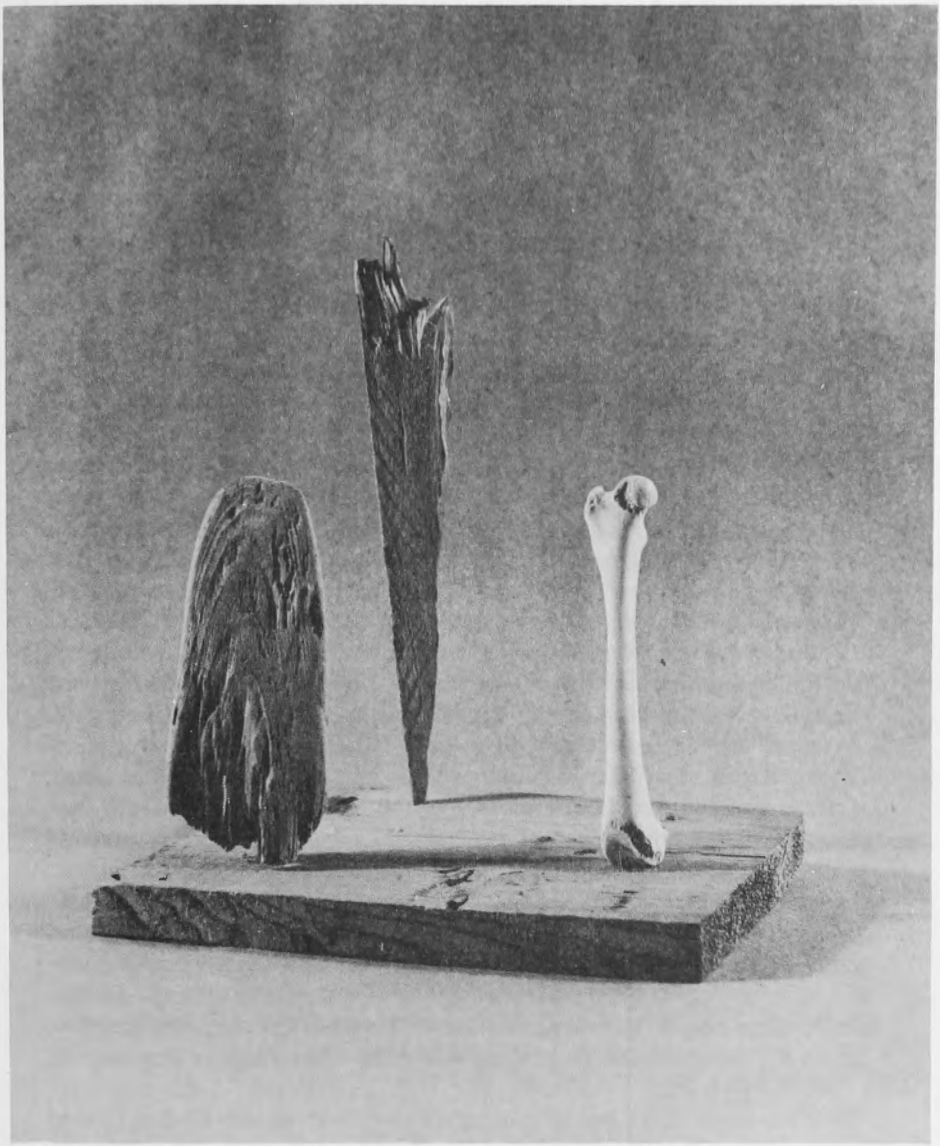


INSTRUMENTOS

New York City, 1987
(Photo: César Paternosto)

ESPIRAL

Chile, 1966
(Photo: Jorge Vicuña)



CEMETERY

Mixed Media, Wood, Bone, 8 x 8 x 6",
New York City, 1982
(Photo: César Paternosto)

ELIOT WEINBERGER

"EVERYTHING 'DEAD' TREMBLES,"

writes Wassily Kandinsky in 1913: "Not only the stars, moon, wood and flowers of which the poets sing, but also a cigarette butt lying in an ashtray, a patient white trouser button looking up from a puddle in the street. . .everything shows me its face, its innermost being, its secret soul."

At the same moment, the other K of the Russian avant-garde, Velimir Khlebnikov is writing: "The only freedom we demand is freedom from the dead."

The modernist project of exalting the new and obliterating the rest, of replacing sunflowers with spark plugs as inspirational source and imaginative subject, aged faster than the gadgets of its affection. But the opposite drift of the modern—the recovery of everything, the inclusion of all that had been excluded—remains vivid, for the continuing lesson of the century is the sameness of the stuff of the world:

Trouser buttons may have turned to zippers, but both, like stars and wood, became recognized as merely varying configurations of the same subatomic particles. People were discovered to have the same dreams, tell the same stories, construct variants of the same societies. The same genetic rules were applied to clams and conquerors.

In this brotherhood (sisterhood) of the same, everything takes on an equal weight: Lautréamont's umbrella and sewing machine meet (make love) on the dissecting table. And what they produce—say, a trouser button—becomes as worthy an object of contemplation as an Alpine sunrise or the ruins of Karnak.

There's a story that George Washington Carver had a dream. God appeared before him, and told Carver to ask anything he wanted to know. Carver said, "Tell me everything about the peanut." And God replied: "Your mind is too small to understand a peanut."

[Written for an exhibit by Cecilia Vicuña at Exit Art, NYC, May 1990.]

And in a world where circular or linear time had been replaced by exploding, simultaneous, Einstein time, what was ancient was the latest news. And the latest news was what the ancients knew all along.

The Modernist enthusiasm for archaic art was not merely a developing taste for simple forms and complex assemblages, as the current history runs. What the Moderns saw were manifestations of power. These strange or common objects were made to control life and death, sex and weather and food and illness. They were meant to change their world.

In the universe of identical things—theirs and now ours—what is not the same, what remains in a state of continual change, is the relation among the things. The same particles spin into hawk and mouse, Anthony and Cleopatra, paint and canvas, Abbott and Costello: the world begins when they collide.

But more: switch them around and it's a different world: mouse and canvas, Abbott and Cleopatra. . .

(Or Cleopatra and her nose. Pascal ruminates: If it had been longer, the face of the world would have changed.)

In the luminous net of relations the slightest change—even watching—changes it all. Cut a single fern frond and stick it in the middle of a trail. The gesture, nearly everywhere, would be meaningless. In New Guinea, among the Kaluli, it means that the souls of the bananas will not escape from a newly planted field: there'll be food in the months ahead.

Magic is dependent on the power latent in the least conspicuous object. A few fingernail parings can kill a man; a feather can ward off a hurricane. It is the context, and the act of placing in the context that gives the useless scrap its power.

And what happens when that act occurs outside of its culture—or more exactly, occurs in a culture that does not automatically recognize its significance? What happens, in other words, when Schwitters picks a bus ticket out of a Berlin gutter and pastes it on a canvas alongside of similar debris?

As an act of magic, it belongs to a private superstition: a lucky charm in someone else's pocket. And yet a Schwitters bus ticket is strangely numinous: that representation of a world by its most insignificant member remains far more moving than the contemporary celebrations of dirigibles and hydroelectric plants.

It is a Chinese wisdom: the grass bends under the conquering armies; when they have swept by, it stands up again. The particular is epic.

For twenty years, Cecilia Vicuña has been engaged in similarly useless, significant gestures.

She makes a circle of colored powder on a Pacific beach. She spills a glass of milk on a street in Bogotá. She hides bundles of twigs among the rocks in the hills overlooking that city. She floats tiny rafts in the Hudson. She places clay snakes around a fire hydrant. She ties strings between the boulders near a Peruvian lake. She assembles bits of natural and artificial debris into tiny sculptures she calls "precarios" (precarious things) or "basuritas" (bits of garbage, a little litter).

Descended from the practices of Andean shamans, these are the ritual acts of a personal religion. Their life span is negligible, though some linger in individual memories, and a few have been recorded on film. They are the haiku that are written on paper boats to be set out in the lake, the new year's wishes that are burned at midnight.

The objects employed in these rituals are garbage. Not the garbage produced by tribal religion: the works made for a single use, then tossed aside to be collected and exhibited in museums of primitive art. Nor are they trash-heap archive—the midden kingdom—by which we know so many buried cultures. These ritual objects do not become—they are made of—garbage.

But it is nature's garbage, not ours: feathers, shells, driftwood, pebbles, leaves. Pieces of a landscape of debris that came into existence when its normal use was abandoned: when we stopped burning firewood, when we invented new adornments to replace the feathered capes and necklaces of shells.

Tiny bits of nature rescued for a moment: "precarious," Vicuña writes, comes from the Latin "precis," meaning prayer.

We may take these sculptures and the acts that created them in the Western sense: brief personal supplications sent to the heavens. Or we may take them as numerous cultures understand prayer: sent from the heavens to earth. A momentary incarnation of the gods in language, or—and Christianity retains this in its cults of "speaking in tongues"—a direct message from them.

What do these gods say? Vicuña gives us, literally, a "clue": a ball of thread. (That which led Theseus out of the labyrinth was transformed with usage into anything that might lead to the solution of a mystery.)

Everywhere in Vicuña's work there are threads and cloth, themselves products of natural debris: the dead hair of animals, the fluff that sends the cotton seeds airborne so that the plant may propagate.

Thread, universally, is what ties people to the gods; its arrangement into warp and woof, cloth and the act of weaving, remains a perennial metaphor for both the complexities and the seamlessness of the world.

And it too is prayer: Vicuña points out that both "sutra" and "tantra" mean "thread." It too is language: the Incas (and possibly the archaic Chinese) wrote in a system of knotted threads suspended from a small stick. The woven and embroidered cloth of countless cultures are historical records, collections of myths, maps of the universe.

For millennia, the Andean peoples were unquestionably the most advanced weavers on earth: more than anywhere else, the fabric of their culture is inextricable from fabric itself. What's left of much of it is a few scraps: some of the technical processes are now inimitable; most of the iconographic meaning has dropped out.

These are symbolically the scraps Vicuña drapes over her tiny sticks; the scraps to which she attaches her bits of feather and shell. They are the few pieces of bone from which dinosaurs are reconstructed, the shard that is irrefutable evidence.

Threads and scraps of cloth and scattered remains of natural rubbish: trembling messages from dead cultures and dying nature. Like irregular electromagnetic wave patterns from a distant star, they cannot be decoded, they are anomalies for which our explanations are insufficient. They put us on alert: there may be more going on then we thought.

Given a twig, a pebble, and a place to stand, she tries to move the earth.

RACHEL BLAU DUPLESSIS
DIASPORAS

Thru the rusty furze, thru the misted light,
thru the hungry books
words
related to the torn debris
lightly fall,
brush
the stumbled walker
who enters scenes of scattering by the gate of loss.

Wordlessness whirlwinds words
at that limen, articulating multiples
that cannot even be attached or
arrived at to greet, so foreign and distant, and
so near and constant,
the sets were experienced as one confusion.

These spaces of dispersion
are marked with bourns
which disappear amid the fields of scree
as stones.
So gifts are swallowed up by gifts.
Even erasure is erased.
In this, what residue remains?

The green horizon, winter dusk,
curbs, ground-down dabs,
sleek styrofoam weathered into gritty pebbling,
food pressed face down on the asphalt
scattered
thru the flicker-ridden labyrinth,

here

we are,

gripping frayed ends of the yarn together,
bull-face and seeker.

This small evidence of hope, that our flawed light

MEASURES THE HEADLINES

warily
point for point.

'Twas the new year cold,
and the old year done.
Hung a full moon
twice that 31st.
It rose in the dark,
and it rose at the dawn.

Introducing the "J" of jour, the our of hour,
versus "A": flat, primary, simple.
First it's J.
Then it's A,

parry and grapple, sleek and troubled,
leg over leg on the shimmering tarmac.
Advantage agnostic.

Happens
your yeasty jousters
are oddly,

like Ques. and Ans.,
odic and oracular,
joy and anger,
just evenly matched.

Matted mists rise
from felled leaves
after the whirlwind.
Melted mists
mishegoss and worse,

Names that cannot rise.

Names wedged in cardboard huts from
major appliances.
Xeroxing

city by city;
stacks on automatic feed, little
rustlings over vents,

mechanisms under glass,
darkly you thought
THAT was a what?

an empty carton? THIS simply
rags, drain-plugs, trash
rolled up in bags by the Department

of the Treasury, askew
and stinking. But look:
what is and that it is.

On the pivot
of a vast immired time
the little fizzle of firecrackers
went pop-pop in the humid silence,
the irradiant bleakness
of this midnight turn. Why it's "already"

1991

one more throb of pops down wicks flung into the
distance

and all around a void of open time
to the right of us, to the left of us.

And want to rise up, compelled
to change the order of events, to overturn
priorities and registers. Own up
powers dominating an unseen. They
solid for war: And drag to camp that Trojan
Horse, the surgical
metaphor. Of course, modernized,
administering anaesthesia highs. But
who was the patient "etherized"?
We profiteering, prophesying, sighing.
The center, an abyss The A repeated useless over
and over lolling doped
uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh uh ayh ayh
turning to I I I I aye aye aye aye ai ai ai ai
scattered by one, one, one waste pretense. It was the dust rising
and falling that formed the holden
source of all this "dreath."
It was solid blackness up from the dis(re)membered
ordures and ordeals.
It was children once again to be issued bumbled stumps for feet.

My m-m-ry looked back and turned to salt.
A glistening dolmen.
Does it want to weep?

"It" doesn't choose
"It," is chosen
by the frozen one-way track
of time

Implacable

(Light!
"opening" birds
"lofting, spinning"

transcendent flocks
flecking the wide "horizon"—signs
of a poet,
or for one.

Why not car roof snow slid soft,
and refroze drip-marked over the windshield?

Why not furtive copies, ripping off
the part-time joblet,

with one long hair
fallen onto the glass screen, recurring
on all her Xeroxes, twisting at random,
circling words.

Dingedicht, Dongedacht, Dingedicht, Dongedacht)

And into the valley of death
I or J wrestled
pulled apart at the jointure or juncture.
The little rocks and bumps
were welded together with blood, and blood
filled the streams, which were called "runs," and
misty blood evaporated in the hollows.
Such a tiny set of hedgerows over which the soldiers fling
and were flung.
Cost it out.
The deep hung crevasses of shape and meaning
make
just a flicker over ever-whispering space.

"Then" I felt the dead, returned as deer, sidle
    silently in the night to the block of white,
        rub and lick

mutter in the various
    clotted tones of
        their living voices

one word:
creole of creoles.
The rest blown away

Into the incomparable.

Struggling with

Unfed. Thug. Bread. ashes wet
Flagged pilings. Blood maimed. ashen face
Flayed pages. Manna and matter in the drear station

and historical dread.

So that the first digits of my MAC card are exactly the number of civilians killed at Mylai or Mylae, alongside the final digit, which is the number of persons in my family, allowing, or not, for the ambiguities of reporting, lies, cover-ups, disinformation, disingenuous spokespersons—so often now women—, and who or what one is counting; also whether one numbers the dead and the living, or only the dead, or only the living, on either the "historical plane" or the "personal." Or only numbs the living. So that there is an enormous amount of webbing and one is taxed with the question what to do first or at all: unwrap it as from the mummy, sort it and maybe the little ants can still be persuaded to help, follow its loose-leaf strands as they blow thru the arena, neaten it, perhaps by a traditional weaving, brush it away like gossamer spinning, hang it all, or some unknown and awkward correlation of jerky, improvident, undeveloped, and spastic gestures, neurological overflow in which scryers find a symptom of ("unliterary") disorders, giving unintended and/or unreadable consequences. So that—

"It means

seize hold of a memory

as it flashes up

at a moment of danger."

hole of a memory

Get real!

June 1990–June 1991

CHARLES CANTALUPO
GESTATION

A creator is nothing
And forgotten for the use
Of any beginning but composite:
No one match fire, no burning circle
Except a mouthful of hot wax;
No nuclear original
Except cut out of infinite
Female power figures
Separated and stuck with all the tacks
Of your summoning her areolae
For less painting than darkening
And rubbing smooth and crust the stopped
Power breath inserted in the hidden
Palm-oiled cave beneath all waters
To protect the fetus in her furs.
Dive down into a devil's hole,
Look through eyes in a dark wall,
Let a wedding band rip away your finger,
Black tape the mouth and eyes of a sculpted head,
Wait like a hotel room's empty drawers,
And you'll still mistake shell as the core,
Unsatisfied desire as the divine,
Evil as your friend, human as the dead
And isolation as spirit
If you aspire to the birthing country
Without the evidence of refuse
And the Great Pan's tracks—
Empty cans and cartons, plastic shreds,
Used styrofoam and condoms, dirty filters—
Dumped in roadside ditches where you stare

At whatever you read as a sign
Of the four-faced person riding the single horn
Out of your skull to prepare the newborn
To accept insignias of recall
After their arms and legs are lopped,
And wear the mask of exposed blades again,
Wild coiffure, ten feet of snakey soul
Around her neck with leopard teeth and beaks
To swing out wide, black, white and red
With her ivory ears, fine scars, nostrils
Slit for sex, a coat of quills
And soon a navel filled with sticks
To dance a dusty circle of coition
With nothing pure, first, written, or expected
While amnion floods her sight with tongues
Extending song from deep in her forming lungs.
Remembering the sling and powerless and meek
As this apple, you can also nurture
Spiders to weave and foresee,
Swallows to build countries, bats to lighten suns
And dolphins to sound them like her eyes
Burning through dead seas in no direction
Except away from contaminated shores
Where seals give birth in the turpentine air
And wolves of dew destroy the tricks
Of water spirits to make the domestic
An uncontrollable wilderness of kills
Stage-managed free of invisible skies
And multiplying order, balance and logic
To come to the sum of a basket
Stuffed with cowries, chimp and crocodile skulls,
Leaves, buttons, nuts, turtle shells, bits of chrome,
Mushrooms, broken watches, hair, newspaper,
Anteater scales, red parrot feathers and suet
Carried by a midwife down a furrow
Of ten lands and ten races where she pulls
A crystal out of the ridge of shiney, bleeding home,
And the name you give the baby already knows.

AMIRI BARAKA
A MEDITATION ON BOB KAUFMAN

Frink /
/ Kauf meant thought
Banged
Back

in A L T I T U D E

So that thought
& "Freak"
collided

to
HANG

City Side

Quiet as

breathing

Always
Frinking —

ABOMUNISTS

WERE

UNDERCOVER

HUMANS

LAUGHING

F O O T P R I N T S

•

BOB KNEW VIOLENCE
REMEMBERED
HIS HAIR

& FRINK

SUSPECTED
HE RODE AS
WELL AS
WORSHIPPED
Pterodactyls

He knew the
poison
equation

Dorsey
Rothschild
(TIME)

SMOKE

MINE
vs
(RHYTHM)
o o
o o
o SLAVERYS o
o o
o o
o o
o o
D E A T H
oo

WOLFMAN
WOLFMAN

Pterodactyls
WING THUMP SHADOW
Across Earth

BOP

CRACKLE ELECTRICITY TO
BE
ATOMIC PERSONAL DOT
ABOMUNIST PRINTS
1ST AMENDMENT
FRANKENSTEIN
CAVE HIPSTER
1ST COOKER AMIDST
Red Dripping Teeth
Mad Animal Family
Hoppers Opposition
Up top the tree
Bob roosted to see
the stars, Atomic television
sky, life itself,
hairy astrologer communist
the big feet
tracking across the
Be
Bomkauf, from his
Sightings
his hip sat thought
time pattern
was called
said the correct
path
the right
way
the print
is what stooges
say is an
empty foot

Ark

Hairy half person

to whom

they never

ain't

Any way!

Hence *Bop,*
the triumph of clubs
as
trumps.

Donald like his Duck
A Quack
& not a rise
his pitiful paper
& shiny metal
personality

& Trump is not Jewish
or You/ish (except
when you are
gaseous)
a lowered
the same as Lord

in dispense wit
the whole height of
site's sight. We stay up
all night, dont fight,
create & dig light.

And then the egg man
wants humans & sees
print & *bans* it.

Wolf man over Wolf man

All nation's equation
The Base, de base
so now its crackers
before it was jigs
our hairy mamas
did the work and
farther on the hype.

Scuse me tracks, BombKauf
isolated in West Jaws
a trick story (some say)
others
opportunize around
his myth

Sons & Lovers
Boiled yeggs & ohs
Seeds of non dick howling
crime pee

My friend drama town
City lights will cook
the boy
his head, shorn, his smile,
worn

For we who have never been
anarchists
who have never been
Buddhists
Us Sheeps
of Storm Center

"Lover" is one of Jimmy's
Brothers'
names. Get to that!
At my worst I was a King
& turned President
as a resident

Now the clouds
wave me
back
or
Black

I cant Attack
No Real
Life

A Stooge
is Eating
the Pop Corn
Joey.

This is our only noise
& its a song
on television

I say BombKauf, the
ABomunists
Were
Reds
whose foot prints yodeled
like pre God Pygmies

BombKauf
you were an egg beater
no ego
but the closing eye

of slipping

nigger death

(to the whiteness which
Keeps his memory

a Fish
a Cross
a Furnace of Evil
A Growed up Nazi to be
Full fledged
White Guy!

The abominable
snowman

nasty
coke
in
Athens

Where
Everything, even
Water
Melons

was Created

Human
Beings
Bob
That's what you
Heard

A POST AMERICAN

Phenomenon

Communists
are the
ones

Tracked down
By
No Man

No Oh

S'NO MAN'S
NOR WOMAN'S
HEAR?
(This place

Race itself spells
Competition
19th century

All the way

& then they even lost

that!

Over the hill to
Grandma's house
Over the sea's to
we nother better hip

you dig?
Abomunist
try
Communist

Await on skates, post the
dead dug
Lightning
Fast, no meat
meeting

Knew
then
New
No Sin
Being What All
of it
& Any
Plenty
my man, us
all men
& Them w/ Wombs

we working
on that

It's Why the Sun

Do
What It
Do

We dont recognize

Anything

Unless

We're gone
be recognized
in that messy
manner

A live Shadow farting
like a
brain
clock
O? Aha? Yes!

No Know
It's all here going away
,waving
pictures
breathing
pictures
imagining
pictures
live feeling. Bob

Round up voices, bodies
& flicks

Every All wants & wents
to
be No Shit

That's the only rule
& of course I'm going
to the bath room
in a lidda
while

PAST US

US PAST

NEVER

&c

EVER

&c

Why dont we turn

around—

The usual suspects

Hoo Ray!

Hoo Ray!

(ca' 89 from
Journal of the Crossroads) 5/91

INTRODUCING UNICA ZURN

Edited by Renée Riese Hubert

RUTH HENRY

MY ENCOUNTER WITH UNICA

(Tr. from the French by Judd D. Hubert)

It all began long ago, in 1959, years after my own arrival in Paris, at the opening of a very important exhibit at the Cordier Gallery: *Exposition Surréaliste Internationale.* In the midst of a lively company, I was struck by the intensely concentrated expression of a most attractive woman. Many surrealists, appearing carefree and in high spirits, had gathered there once again and perhaps for the last time with their friends. Unica had come with Hans Bellmer, her companion, but she was decidedly a participant, for the show featured her own works alongside those of Bellmer himself, of Hans Arp, André Breton, Marcel Duchamp, Sebastian Matta, Meret Oppenheim, Victor Brunner, Jacques Hérold, and Man Ray.

When I went over to present myself to her—to the one quiet person in the midst of this boisterous assembly—she rewarded me with a smile that quite literally can be described as a burst of light. Unica's childlike smile not only suggested some hidden, otherworldly presence but impressed the viewer as a natural event, as the dawning of a radiant day. And I heard her say in an astonishingly deep voice: "But you speak German!" By this time Unica could of course express herself in French, even though she always spoke German with Bellmer with whom she had been living in Paris since 1953. Very well read in French literature, she showed a particular fondness for romantic and surrealist writings. She had already published a book of anagrams and drawings entitled *Hexentexte* at the Springer Gallery, Berlin, in 1954. Few of her Parisian friends knew about this work, even those who had felt from the beginning the poetic impact of this shy woman who kept to herself (it could hardly have been otherwise) in the presence of Bellmer.

Some of her friends recognized her qualities as a graphic artist and later on as a painter. Her strangely moving works, so often imbued with anguish, revealed a universe dominated by nature and dreams. And those who had considered her art a marginal product resulting from her intimate relation-

ship with Bellmer would soon learn how mistaken they were and realize that they were dealing with uniquely personal creations arising from quite different origins. André Pierre de Mandiargues had prefaced two of her shows at the gallery "Le Soleil dans la Tête," the first in 1953, the second in 1957. And for her major 1962 show at "Le Point Cardinal" Max Ernst designed a "cryptographic" foreword.

And there I was, in the very place where I had met Unica three years earlier, meditating upon her beautiful drawings. When I asked about her they told me that she was undergoing treatment at Sainte-Anne, the psychiatric hospital, and not for the first time, for she suffered from recurrent schizophrenic attacks. Urged by Henri Michaux, who had brought her paper, pencils, pens, and India ink, she had started to draw during one of her stays in the clinic. Her book, *Der Mann im Jasmin*, (The Jasmine Man) shows the key role this artist and poet played in Unica's creative development by his exploration of anonymous states capable of leading to liberation and, better still, to deliverance. It was indeed the manuscript of this book that occasioned in 1965 my second encounter with Unica, leading to a friendship that lasted until her death.

She was no longer the same person. She had aged considerably, and her repeated crises had undermined her physical strength and destroyed her radiance. For days on end she was unable to go out and, to make things worse, Bellmer himself kept more and more to himself. Stiffened (in fact catatonically paralyzed, unable, for instance, to descend a staircase unaided) she remained seated on a couch, holding between her fingers the inevitable "gauloise." Her gestures had become considerably slower, she had been weakened by chemical treatments (which would never stop), and in fact seemed to survive only as an intellect. She placed before me a rather bulky manuscript that she herself had typed during months of protracted effort. It was her "Eindrücke aus einer Geisteskrankheit" (Impressions from a Mental Illness) that she entitled *Der Mann im Jasmin*.

But how did such a text come into being? Could it be that literary practice (certainly not the prime intent of such an activity) leads to spiritual relief? Can the jotting down of the experience of alienation deliberately provide therapy or result in a literary creation?

Ever since surrealism proposed the systematic exploration of the creative thrust of the unconscious we have become aware of the porousness between barriers. The very precision of clinical descriptions bores us with its monotonous reiterations (all accounts of delusion seem to have been cast in the same mold), whereas there exist a few rare literary works, Gérard de Nerval's *Aurélia* and Antonin Artaud's *Lettres de Rodez* among them, that fascinate us by their authenticity, their emotional impact, their richness. One thing is certain: unlike André Breton in *Nadja*, Unica did not exploit the world of hallucination in order to produce the lyrical effects so admired

by surrealist poets, for she was compelled to undergo the bitter experience of alienation. But she passionately resolved to keep an account of the incredible sufferings (and joys) resulting from her illness. The only strength she succeeded in retaining through all the "crises" that befell her was the power to take notes with the detachment of a skilled and neutral observer. I became more and more convinced in the course of our conversations that every text produced by Unica after 1960, including *Written in Fear* and *Games that two can play*, was strictly autobiographical. If they occasionally give the impression of being overwhelmingly poetic, that is because of Unica's literary upbringing, because her style of writing remained perfectly attuned to the great romantic tradition of Germany and the "marvelous" of Surrealism. Such was the reaction of a critic concerning *L'Homme jasmin* in 1971.

Unica Zürn, who preferred to speak about herself in the third person, explained the origins of the book:

> For those brief and wonderful moments of hallucination, which give her no fear whatever, she has to pay a high price, for she subsequently falls into deep depressions. It is easy for doctors to treat her troubled state of mind during a "crisis" by means of medication, but far more difficult to pull her out of a state of lethargy that prevents the slightest serious occupations. In some hospitals, they help cure the patients by having them participate in various activities. For this reason, she forces herself to keep on drawing so as to overcome the dullness of long empty days. But results are poor and for the most part absolutely hopeless. By contrast, the extraordinary states of the hallucinating mind, and the fantastic world opening before her during each of her "crises" retain all of their fascination and poetry.

These impressions were noted after her cure.

When finally *L'Homme jasmin*, completed in 1966, was published in Paris in 1971, years before the original German text, the critics praised it as a major discovery and admired the documentary precision of its moving self observations as well as a literary mastery quite devoid of sentimentality. Michel Leiris, who had known her only as an artist, wrote me about his surprise at discovering that Unica had produced a text that provided him with his most important reading of the year. And Unica had died the previous year.

When personal and artistic intentions are closely linked, as is the case with Unica, readers are entitled to know relevant facts about the author's life. Far from being taken for granted, this right requires justification. It is

therefore only because the legitimacy of such an enquiry appears self-evident in the present instance that biographical data will be taken into consideration in order to provide partial answers to the readers' questions concerning Unica's artistic and literary achievement.

Born on July 6, 1916, in Berlin, she spent, in her own words, a "marvelous" childhood in a huge house in the residential area of Grünwald. There she was surrounded by a collection of oriental art assembled by her father, a globe-trotting writer. Her favorite objects were "an Indian sculpted Buddha, a Chinese rug with golden threads, and Arabian furniture." The only blot on this otherwise idyllic period was her sense of abandonment during her father's frequent absences, a feeling described in the tale "Daubler Frühlung," first entitled "Schwarzer Frühlung."

Unica had been employed as an archivist at the Ufa-Film Corporation before her marriage in Berlin in 1942. She gave birth first to a daughter and, during the final and most terrifying year of the war, to a son. According to their fond remembrance of her, she was a tender and joyful mother. Nevertheless, when she sued her philandering husband for divorce, she had no choice but to leave them with him, for she felt "too weak" and incapacitated to take care of them by herself.

She then lived among artist friends, writing short stories to earn her living (they were recently published in their entirety by Bose Verlag, Berlin). It was during this period that she met Hans Bellmer who, in 1953, took her to Paris. There, in a small hotel in the Latin Quarter, they led a financially precarious but artistically rewarding existence. Bellmer at that time was hardly known. When she suffered her first "crisis," Unica tried to return to Berlin. This and her following attempts to escape invariably ended in long confinements in psychiatric hospitals. It was only later that she started to write down the "impressions" resulting from her illness. *The Jasmine Man* finally took shape, and it was a dream come true, when, after quietly waiting for an answer, she heard that the translation of her work had been accepted by Gallimard, the most prestigious publisher in France. And then it was Bellmer's turn to fall ill. Hopelessly bed ridden and secluded, he spent his time watching television without sound. His doctors no longer accepted the presence of this woman whose "troubles" led from one "crisis" to the next. So as not to have to send her back to Berlin (after 25 years), a solution she regarded as completely strange, I arranged for Unica, who would never again be capable of living by herself, to reside for one summer in a beautiful place near the Loire, where she continued to write while leading a healthy existence among mostly younger people. But the situation ended as badly as it usually did when Unica was supposed to return to "normal" existence. Moreover, Bellmer no longer was allowed to keep her in his apartment.

There remained no escape for Unica, who could not reasonably expect to live alone. So in 1960 she jumped to her death from a window in Bellmer's apartment, fully aware that her book would soon appear.

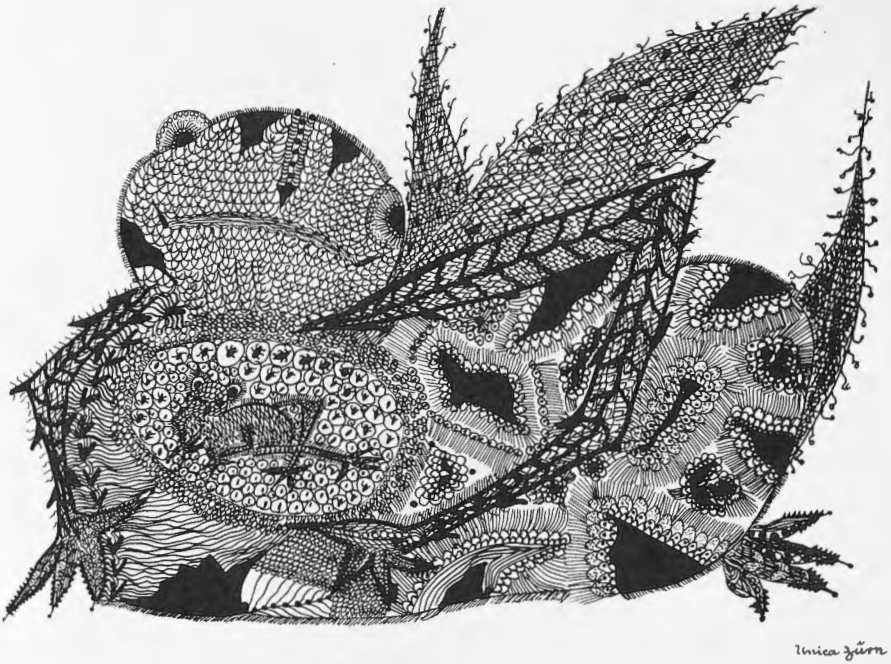
I saw her for the last time on a bed in the morgue, her face bandaged in the customary French manner. For the first time she had a forbidding look and appeared extremely old.

As for her fall from the window, she had made it perfectly clear in the course of several conversations that she lacked both the strength and the will to face old age. She had written her books and given her testimony—before *The Jasmine Man* she had published a tale from her childhood, fascinating in its simplicity and its foreboding: "Dark Spring ends in death." And like the twelve year old in the tale, the girl who was so much like her, she too jumps out of a window—out of life—taking leave of this world because of her sense of lack: lack of love, lack of strength, lack of knowledge.

UNICA ZURN
EIGHT DRAWINGS

For invitation to her exhibit at the Point Cardinal Gallery, January 1962

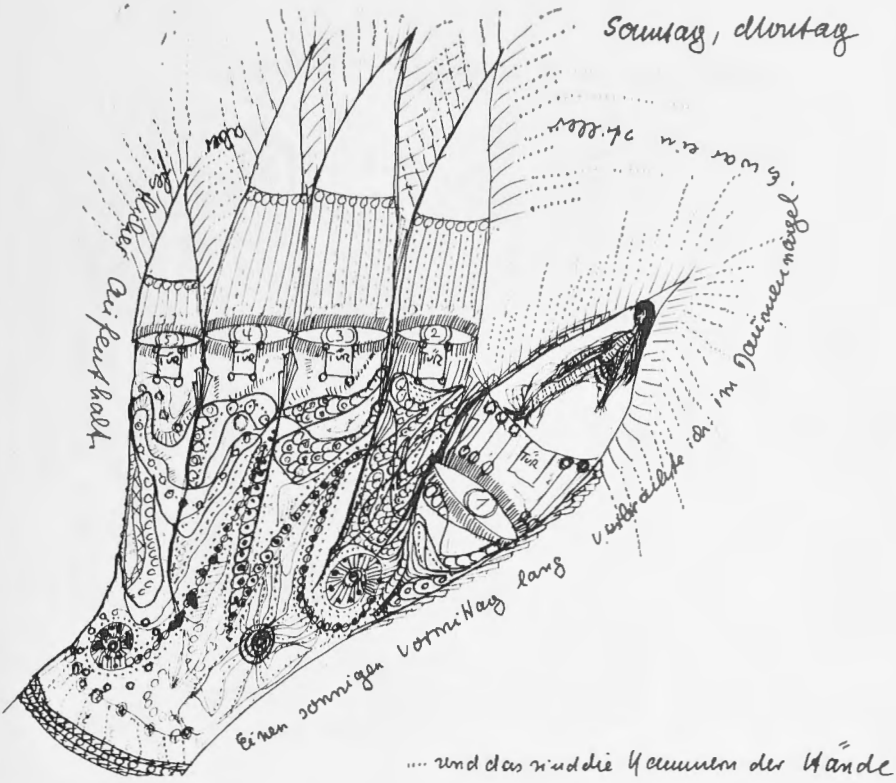
Manuscript & Ink Drawing, for Unkas, der Letzte der Mohikaner, included in *Im Staub dieses Lebens*, 1964



Drawing, 1961

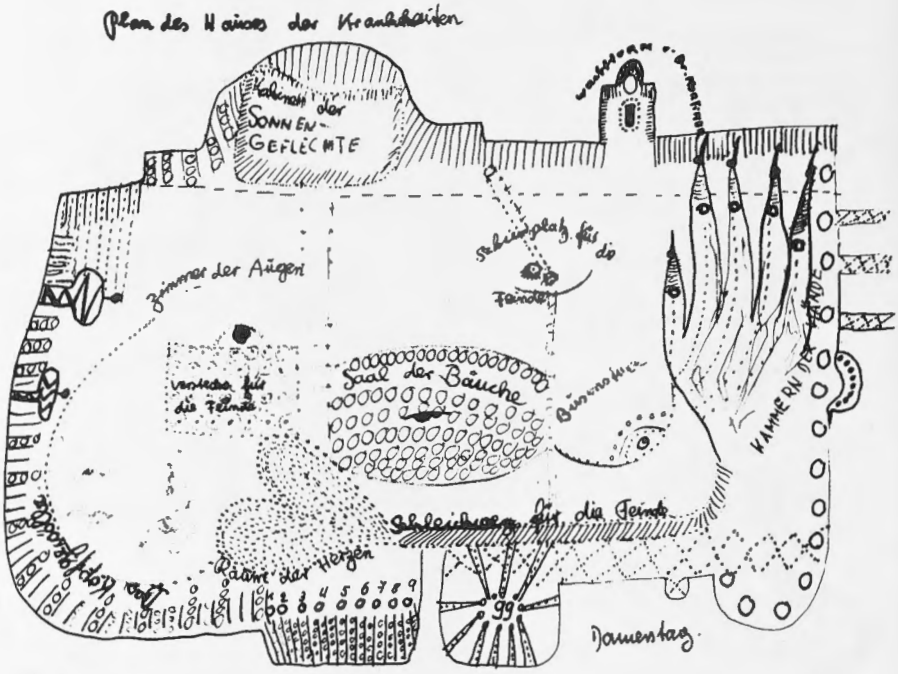
Drawing, 1961

Drawing on a composition of Robert Schumann (probably done at Ste. Anne's Hospital), 1961



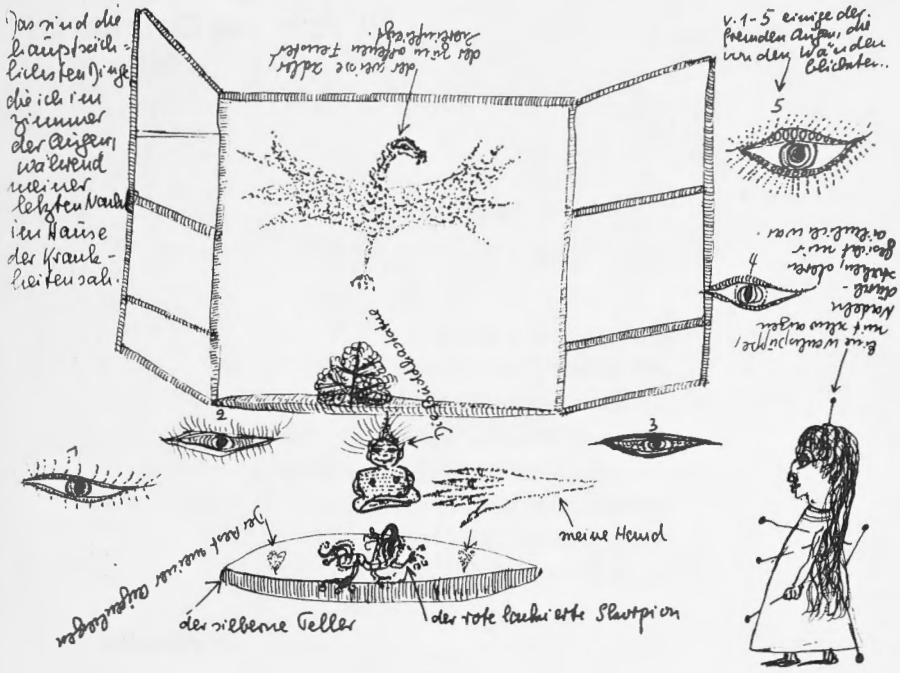
THE ROOM OF THE HAND

Drawing from
Das Haus der Krankheiten, 1958



PLAN OF THE HOUSE

Drawing from
Das Haus der Krankheiten, 1958


Freitag.
Das "verbotene" Zimmer
Das sind die hauptsächlichsten Dinge die ich im Zimmer der Augen während meiner letzten Nacht im Hause der Krankheiten sah.
v. 1-5 einige der fremden Augen, die um den Wänden
5
meine Hemd
der silberne Teller
der rote kauhierte Slawtpion

THE FORBIDDEN ROOM

Drawing from
Das Haus der Krankheiten, 1958

UNICA ZURN
NINE ANAGRAMMATIC POEMS

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris)

IN THE DUST OF THIS LIFE

Pale sieves a tired
Ax in the tree's bosom.
In the foliage's broom there is
Seed-blood-silk. Bites
in the lovenest of the building.
Sweetly fogs in its ice-bath
the Ibis's blood. Masses
in the dust of this life.

Montpellier 1955

ONCE UPON A TIME A SMALL

Once upon a time a small
warm iron was alone. No
Noise, no wine let in.
Lightly at the sea ran, while no
Ice was, thrush-pink in a
See-egg. All wink: tear
like all seeds. Sink in,

watergerm, no, alone—
in a pillow. All warmth
once upon a time's a mall.

Montpellier 1955

AND IF THEY HAVE NOT DIED

I am yours, otherwise it escapes and
wipes us into death. Sing, burn
Sun, don't die, sing, turn and
born, to turn and into Nothing is
never. The gone creates sense—or
not died have they and when
and when dead—they are not.

for H.B.
Berlin 1956

DANS L'ATTELAGE D'UN AUTRE AGE

(Line from a poem
by Henri Michaux)

Eyes, days, door, the old country.
Eagle eyes, a thousand days old.

Ermenonville 1957

WILL I MEET YOU SOMETIME?

After three ways in the rain image
when waking your counterimage: he,
the magician. Angels weave you in
the dragonbody. Rings in the way,
long in the rain I become yours.

Ermenonville 1959

THE STRANGE ADVENTURES OF MR K

It is cold. Ravens talk around the lake. Deer
and blackbird drink tea. Raven, seer of
disaster at dusk—first stars—talk, K!
The first toad most miserably died from
Hik. Nearby the donkey-dream jawed. The
nose of poor Mr K is bleeding. Lake,
dark lake of the raven. To breathe means
to live, means climbing dreams of
rare adventures. Those, Mr. K's?

Ile de Ré 1964

YOU'LL FIND THE SECRET IN A YOUNG CITY

Youth sings: now the sea is your harbor. Is
dream and hunt, the spirit's inner feast, that send
him into dark, stony days, yes, you!—and he's
immune from hand and serious sense—yes, You! Victories are
found forebodings. You travel to the city of Jim-Sing.
Go into the youngest street and find Amin, the Ti.
He says: yes, no, once, never, enemy, courage, it, are, you, D, H,
G.
Secret signature? Jade stone? You'll find the meaning.

Ile de Ré 1964

THE LONESOME TABLE

I, the most lonely
mixes his vein
with ashes. Be the
travelling mast—I
journey by night. Avoid
O avoid her, earnest
is the name I—it
is revenge. Mine the
velvet empire, yours
the lonesome table
in the roof. First one?
Stone, I speak: Sam-
Simae-line. End
I, it ends. Simar,
Simae, cross out the
line at the end. Ice

in the table. Roaring,
lonesomest I of
earth. A mast rise
up in seasand:
the lonesome table.

UNCAS, THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS

Unica's heroes murdered—scratch
in cold earth—listen! Thank "M"—
Manitou for it, the cold hangman of
the dream of noble Aztecs. KO-HIR-
KUNAS—KIMHONA, Last One of Earth.
SUNA, the red eagle, limps. KEZ-ME,
the circling, cold anger. THU-MA,
Stone-heart and ALKAE murdered.
Uncas, the last of the Mohicans
speaks to me. Listen to him: "Cold,
sick, old is the mouth, o heart
in earth's ore. Uncas, Thokane,
noble tomahawk of kin—ZUERN—
The last moon—it sank" (Hakirer).

Ile de Ré 1964

HANS BELLMER
PREFACE TO *HEXENTEXTE*[1]

(Tr. from the German by Pierre Joris

ANAGRAMS are words and sentences resulting from the rearrangement of the letters in a given word or sentence.

It is surprising that despite the re-awakened interest in the development of language in psychotics, psychics and children, little thought has been given to the anagrammatic interpretation of the coffee grounds of letters. —It is clear that we know very little of the birth and anatomy of the "image." Man seems to know his language even less well than he knows his own body: the sentence too resembles a body which seems to invite us to decompose it, so that an infinite chain of anagrams may re-compose the truth it contains.

At close inspection the anagram is seen to arise from a violent and paradoxical dilemma. It demands the highest possible tension of the form-giving will and, simultaneously, the exclusion of premeditated purposeful shaping, because of the latter's sterility. The result acknowledges—in a slightly uncanny manner—that it owes more to the help of some "other" than to one's own consciousness. This sense of an alien responsibility and of one's own technical limitations—only the given letters may be used and no others can be called upon for help—leads toward a heightened flair, an unrestrained and feverish readiness for discoveries, resulting in a kind of automatism. Chance seems to play a major role in the result, as if without it no language reality were true, for only at the end, after the fact, does it—surprisingly—become clear that this result was necessary, that no other was possible. Writing one anagram each day of the year would leave one with an accurate poetic weather report concerning one's self at the end of that year.

What is at stake here is a totally new unity of form, meaning and feeling: language-images that cannot simply be thought up or written up. They enter suddenly and for real into their interconnections, radiating multiple meanings, meandering loops lassoing neighboring sense and sound. They constitute new, multifaceted objects, resembling polyplanes made of

[1] *Hexentexte* is Unica Zürn's 1954 collection of anagrammatic poems published by Galerie Springer, Berlin. (Translator's note.)

mirrors. "Beil" (hatchet) becomes "Lieb" (Love) and "Leib" (body), when the hurried stonehand glides over it; the wonder of it lifts us up and rides away with us on its broomstick. The process remains enigmatic. For this kind of imaging and composing to happen, no doubt an eager hobgoblin—oracularly, sometimes spectacularly—adds much of its own behind the back of the I. A pleasantly disrespectful spirit, in all probability, who is serious only about singing the praises of the improbable, of error and of chance. As if the illogical was relaxation, as if laughter was permitted while thinking, as if error was a way and chance a proof of eternity.

PIERRE JORIS

A NOTE ON TRANSLATING UNICA ZURN'S ANAGRAMMATIC POEMS

Unica Zürn's poems are extremely formal yet playful: they are anagrammatic constructs, i.e., each line is a strict transposition of the letters of a given line or phrase, usually the title line. This causes a dilemma for the translator who has to choose between (at least) two ways of translating: s/he has to either translate the procedure & system underlying the composition of the original poem, or translate the semantic construct resulting from this procedure. (Ideally one could imagine someone attempting to translate the procedure and the result simultaneously, but the chance of generating anagrammatic poems based on the source-line that would also reproduce the images and meanings of her texts seems—to this translator at least—extremely improbable, if not beyond the realm of the possible.) The first method of translation would consist in taking the line or sentence Zürn used as her transformational matrix & imitate what she did to this line, i.e., compose an English anagram based on those same letters: but this would of course make for another poem, for the translator's poem. In the second case one would translate the semantic construct, the words and images of the German poem without attending to the method underlying their composition.

I will illustrate these two possibilities using the following one-line poem by Zürn:

> Sur les tapis des paumes et leur sourire
>
> (Gedichtzeile von Henri Michaux)
>
> So ist alles: des Eises Purpur—euer Traum.

As Zürn's parenthetical note informs us, the title is a line taken from a poem by Henri Michaux, which one could roughly translate as follows: "On the rugs, palms of hands and their smile." By recombining all the letters of the French sentence into new words in German, Zürn then composes her own one-line poem. In an attempt to translate Zürn's anagrammatic procedure, I recombined the letters of the French line into English words

and came up with the following one-liner—though innumerable others were no doubt possible (I permitted myself only those liberties that Zürn herself takes, namely adding punctuation—a colon and a hyphen—to make my line's syntax more explicit):

"Ape stirs slim seed: Ur-ape routes rule us."

Using the second method, i.e., translating Zürn's one-liner's semantic meaning as literally as possible from the German, I get the following result: "Thus is everything: the ice's purple—your dream." Both of these attempts at "translation" yield lines that are imagistically interesting & meaningful *per se*—though clearly unrelated & probably unrelatable, both among themselves or back to the meanings of Michaux's original line. How then should the translator resolve the dilemma posed by work such as Unica Zürn's? One could argue that the distance between the meanings & images of the French line & those of the German line generated by Zürn's transformation give the translator permission to come up with results as semantically unrelated as my anagram above. In the final analysis however; what makes her poems gripping work for the reader is not so much the method itself—though it is essential to ***know*** that she did use a specific procedure to generate her texts—, but the meaningful images the poet is able to generate due to/despite of/with & against her chosen procedures. I have therefore chosen to translate Zürn's semantic meanings & images as straight forwardly & accurately as possible, without any attempt at using her compositional procedure—though the reader of this note will now be alerted to that method &, I hope, will thus be able to better appreciate Zürn's work.

Encinitas, July 1991

UNICA ZURN
JOTTINGS OF AN ANEMIC WOMAN

(Tr. from the German by James Phillips)

Ermenonville, December 26, 1957—

I have spent the largest portion of my life asleep, the next largest waiting for a miracle, meditating on the unobtainable. Only little of my time has been given to activities that are different from those of other people.

A childhood that outwardly ended in a single hour, continues inwardly its influence. How often have I wished that my son could have been my father, that my daughter could have been my mother. Often, often! I cannot cope with adulthood; I cannot stop my constant waiting and my crazy expectations of a miracle.

The miracle (that) I cannot describe, to which these pages are dedicated. My miracle will have to be paid for. Its grace, its deigning to appear, will cost (something). Its duration will be short, as all things wonderful. To experience it, I shall probably have to pay with my life. I discovered my lucky number—99—just this month, almost at the same moment I began to write this. Which increases my impression that the miracle is nearing, the miracle whose next step will be death. Beautiful, pathetic dreams!

The number 100 is childish. Yet those who can count that far are nevertheless capable of something. 99 is like a quick breath—better: a balked breath. One can't know what will follow. Will the door fly open, will the curtains disappear. Will beautiful horror walk in? And in what—what form? In a form that proves that life was beautiful and that from now on it is over, since one person's utmost—my utmost—has been given. Next year the 99 will turn into 100. Yes, sometime in 1958—I don't know the exact date—my beautiful 99 will become a dumb 100. As to the 99 itself—how I actually discovered and researched it. . .I do not wish to explain here. That will be my secret. When people go mad, the doctors want to find their secrets out, to try to heal them. When I go mad, it will be on number 99.

I am fairly certain however, that I can't expect to experience the miracle during the last few days of this year. Next year, on a day I am not aware of, the 99 will turn into 100. When that happens, it will all be over: the miracle, the waiting, the danger of going mad on number 99. My miracle is somewhat like a face. A certain, lethal face. I'm too ashamed to describe

it, even in its most remote detail. People will see—no, people will see nothing. "Such a poor shadow of a brain cannot bear much."

That's Hans Christian Andersen.

Since 1949, my dreams have been full of horror and of catastrophic visions. There is a mountain of events which weighs upon me every night anew. I will never be able to move that mountain. Just like when somebody stands with hanging arms. That's my basic posture. For the last half year I've been taking sleeping pills, although I have a natural talent for sleeping. Look! That tiny little pill cuts through dreams, those threads on which I've been hanging for the last 8 years and which have kept me gruesomely dancing every night. My respect for drugs has grown since then. The medication: Hypnotique Supponeryl. Dreamless sleep, painless living. For only 200 francs a package.

December 27, 1957

In 5 days, the year will be over. A year of great encounters. I was able to accompany Hans Bellmer to all the portrait sittings: Man Ray, Gaston Bachelard, Henri Michaux, Matta, Wifredo Lam, Hans Arp, Victor Brauner, Max Ernst. It's been my most important year—although I don't like the word "important." I abandoned myself to the pleasure of (simply) observing these faces and their works. My old yearning to meet people I could admire was thus fulfilled. It struck me this year, almost wounded me with joy. Each one of them is unique. Some of them—how can I find the proper comparison—some of them I have made my brother or my father, without their knowing it. Certain people exist to be worshipped, others to worship. I have always belonged to the latter. Astonishment, admiration, worship—without end. To be in the background, to look on and watch—that is my passive way of life. And I absorb all those that I admire, and include them with the few treasures left of my childhood. It burns, it stirs, reshapes itself, returns from time to time—to spill out in a drawing or an anagram.

And so these treasures torment just as much as calm me. Wishes, hopes for solidarity, Utopian community, a new order of things, purification and reconciliation—regardless of (the) disdainful complications and their endless causes. And as for love—the wonderful nature of which I am convinced, although it seems to contradict all things and people—I mean a distant love, whose powers do not dissipate, but grow immense and uncanny.

I have become somewhat timid recently. I always was, and now am even more so. Something keeps on struggling in me and will not let itself be put to rest. As if I were waiting. . .I've always been waiting. As if one day the proof of blessedness would come. I have no desire to describe it any closer. It prohibits speech—that's why. It comes or doesn't. That's why

I call it a miracle. Today I believe in it more desperately than ever.

The sum of all the faces that I live with has appeared. It exists! Finally I have seen it in its full force, and have understood it. In one person it can be a trace along the forehead or the eyes, or in the palm of the hand, or in a stride disclosing dizziness—(as with my son)—while in another it's along the mouth and chin or in the shoulders' frailty (as with my daughter). But these are only two—only two of the many little stones that hew a sculpture. How long? For as long as I am able to remember. Where does such despair come from? From the confusion of features in one face. And if my childhood ended at the moment that I understood the drama of my parents' lives, did all my wondrous instincts for a single face end there as well?

And then the false-starts, each one with a cry of jubilation: here it is, the face! Mistake! There was something right about the mouth and nose—but something wrong about the forehead and temple. Always just a trace. Never the whole picture. Three times I withdrew compulsively to the hospital bed. Every error ended in a hospital, gave me fever, bent my bones, reduced me to the state of infancy, as dumb as ever. From now on I'll be careful, before I ever pursue another face again. . . .

Only now, as life is coming to an end, do the clear warnings of my childhood reach me once again. An old sensibility that rescues itself like an angel from a heap of rubbish. Bristling skin and hair warn me about this or that, exactly as they did back then, before I was a grown-up. Finally I have overcome those awful days of error, those stalkings of misfortune—my youth—yes, finally I have overcome my youth. I'm getting old. Old age and childhood are beginning to resemble one another. I was never young. I'm an aging infant. Adulthood will now no longer come to me before death. What unearned joy! But I'd be glad if no new day came. Waking in the morning gives me no joy.

The split in our existence—since last August—between Ermenonville and Paris is like a journey between death and living—back and forth. With the bus it takes one hour to get to Paris and back to life. Ermenonville, a very quiet place, can only be like death. A death I do not fear, with which I have been secretly reckoning for a long time, since I always have associated poetry—and my romantic spirit—with it. My love of truth is growing. I don't want to lie. Prefer silence. So much is hushed! Especially important things. An honest conversation nearly is impossible. Which partner should bear the burden of truth? The truth that one confides. We know about the failings of the "truth-fanatics," as soon as they challenge the present to a duel. Silence is the happiest form of understanding. Although even banal talk can be revealing to attentive ears. Truth exists in monologue, but who speaks easily to others of their secrets? That always is a shock. No child, no animal divulges secrets. Out of tactfulness perhaps?

To me, reserve has always seemed the only form of comprehension, the most intimate of explanations, the most thoughtful kind of commitment. But is it possible?

My aversion to motion is growing. Speed disgusts me. Movement and speed are in Paris. Paris is life! Everything here is frictionless—the fog, the cold, the silence. I get out of bed, go walking, pace the rooms, the days pass rapidly. Now it is night, and I don't know what else to write. . .the stubborn hope that something might happen nags away at my health. Indifference alternates with tears and I become preoccupied with my guilty feelings about reclusion. What still stirs me are the sights from our window: the landscape here, the pathways in the Jean-Jacques Rousseau Park leading over to the bakery. Although we often speak of walking through the park to see his—exhumed—grave, I doubt that we will ever do it. Much of what we speak about and say we want to do is never done. That's the way we are, and it's rather binding. It's enough to just imagine something. Doing it could hardly be more beautiful. Yet how I do miss music. . . .

December 28, 1957

After long respite, the dream again whose decipherment contains the word "eternity." But in such an uncanny way!

I believe this dream was caused by seeing pictures from an operating room. I saw them in a magazine: photographs of human organs taken from dead bodies and kept on ice for emergency transplantations. Last night I also dreamt about a beautiful and dangerous creature—half girl, half snake—that was obviously bloodthirsty. For that reason, all of its bodily organs capable of doing damage to anyone had been removed. Its eyes, its tongue, its heart and other vital parts had also been removed, to further make it harmless. It was beautiful—so exquisitely mummified that it looked alive—and was presented for our marvel. After this we realized, in horror, that it could speak even without a tongue, could see without eyes, and live without a heart—even without blood. It possessed tremendous strength and was able to make plans, without a brain. It had now become even more lively, glowing, intelligent and obsessed with hatred and revenge than before—sustained by an inhuman power and anger. Only by fleeing were we able to escape total destruction at the hands of this marvelous and terrifying creature. After waking up, I still was filled with unequivocal astonishment. I was sorry that the dream had ended, since I could have learned about the way this creature was going to destroy me. Or was the creature me myself? Or a reflection of my waiting for a miracle?

It is evening now. I have nothing to add. Nothing but the torment of my heart, which increases after dark. Torment of the body, of the heart, from the middle of the torso, left to right, then downward—from a head that is only satisfied when it lies upon a pillow and closes its eyes in sleep.

The appetite of our cat Heinrich is appalling. His total being concentrates itself on the hissing gas burner where a soup is steaming. He sleeps, he eats, he sleeps, he eats. And fills with tenderness the pauses. How dear he is. How hungry for contact. The parched, unpleasant air produced by the heating pipes in our room often drives Heinrich out into the cold front room, where he climbs up on an empty children's bed to continue sleeping. It has rained all day, and will rain all night. I am so worn out, fearful of every rustling, so devoid of inner cheer that I am disgusting to myself. Such boredom—boredom in a terrifying dimension—and it keeps increasing. I am impolite, unlovable—my body is a gray pulp. I am withering away—am already withered—and decomposing. I smell awful, everything is awful. I forget that I have legs, can no longer think as far down as my feet and could say, as Hans' grandmother used to: "Oh, I's ahurtin' awful. . . ." Things aren't going well and I don't know how they could go better.

December 29, 1957

In two more days the year will be over. How could the miracle take place in these two days? The miracle, and the death that comes with it. I fear that I'm dishonoring my death.

I feel better now that the sun is shining. Ermenonville in sunlight and the crowing roosters. Before our windows the highway is full of tourists' cars going back and forth between Senlis and Paris. Ermenonville: 12 letters. The digital sum of 12 is 3. . .and 3 times 3 is 9. Grünewald, where I grew up, has 9 letters. I think that since my childhood in Grünewald, I have never been as happy as here in Ermenonville. I feel immediately better when the sun comes out. When the sun shines, my sorrow retreats a few steps into the background. It waits for sunset. When I lay in bed and read Andersen's fairy tales or Alain Fournier's *Le Grand Meaulnes*—especially Henri Alain Fournier because that makes 18 letters or a digital sum of 9 (1 plus 8 is 9). Especially that book, over and over. Then (all) my sorrow is consolidated in me, including that of my son Christian—9 letters and the sorrow of Henri Alain Fournier—and they read along with me about the discovery and disappearance of miracles and we all fall asleep together. But before that, something else happens that even Heinrich notices—I mean he seems to see something that neither Hans nor I can see, something that "wanders" thru the room. As if a handful of peas, or a handful of glass beads had bounced off the wall; Werner Heldt once told me this was the sign of something "wandering" in a room. I often think of Werner Heldt, almost every day and in this way perhaps I help him onto immortality. If he daily comes alive in us, it doesn't matter that his body has been buried somewhere in the earth.

In two more days the year is over and with it, or so I think, the number 99. How childishly, how stubbornly I am caught up in this oracle and do

not even care about being free from it. It's like the chores I gave myself on Sunday afternoons in Grünewald. Tests of courage that I had to pass jumping 3 times from the highest wall, climbing 3 times to the highest branch, or running 3 times around the house as fast as possible (and I wasn't a good runner at all)—until my heart would almost burst. 3 times 3 is 9! And I cannot stop speculating on the 9—the 99—not now—perhaps in spring—but not yet! I yearn and thirst for the miracle. No matter what it actually is. How horrible a secret can become when always the same things occur, when habit and satisfaction, these two fat and ugly pig-breeders start to prevail. The known—the all-too-known—disgusts me.

I have become unproductive.

Hardly have I mentioned it, and the sun disappears. The sky is grey, no birds in earshot. Growing gray and rapidly darkening, the afternoon makes us a nest. A nest of confidence and friendship in which we embrace and hold to one another: to be together, to belong together. As fearful as we both are, each of us depends upon the other's help and care—for solitude is horrible!

Now the night has come. It keeps on coming, from the heart into the belly, left to right, breathes upward with a stifling pressure from the breast into the brain. Reason doesn't say a word—although it tries to tell me that I'm wrong—that I should be ashamed to let myself be so confused by fantasies, by nothing but fantasies. This is not just superstition. Maybe I am close to overcoming it. My mind, which otherwise I so gladly separate from my weighty body, returns to me a bit, to my legs, head and hands. But I won't let myself be convinced that what I call haunting is not true. I am haunted, as if I were the only home for some uncertain thing. There is an "absence" all around me—even Heinrich knows it: he looks up, moves from the bed to the chimney, stares at the empty air—it ripples and rolls and rustles and cracks. But those are rats! Rats in the chimney.

I just stood in the open window. Behind me the glowing room, before me the dark garden, the black country road, with a barking dog, a mooing cow in the farmyard behind the high wall across from us. I say "Here I am, what are you waiting for," in keeping with my current mood for detective stories. Whoever isn't out there now to take advantage of the light and shoot at me—and then to shoot himself, that ceremonious nonentity—who, what? What, for heaven's sake is happening to me? It's the miracle. Who? He, or better, IT! This IT that has been spying on me recently from everywhere, whose middle I am in, who walks with me down stairs, into the garden, out the gate, along the road, into the forest, or into the butcher's—the IT which points at me and, finally, will pass me over—which will disappear. And that will be salvation. Yes, that's how it will happen: it will disappear and I'll forget it. To suppress it, to remove it from existence, I will find a name for it some day, and use it. Namelessness is

worse than anything one finds a name for (even if a false one): winter melancholy, death instinct, fantasy—that's its name! The encircled, the observed from far away, that presence on all roads with me, these last few days, will pass away and then I'll know my miracle has not come true—like Christmas never coming for a child—for other children, yes, but not for *one*.

December 30

The day is now half over, and at 3 p.m. it starts getting dark. Heavy bodies, heavy, stuffy head on painful shoulders—nothing is right for anything, everything is in the way, I stumble on myself. When I cough, I think about tuberculosis, when my head aches, I think about a brain tumor. Death won't be coming this year. Eating and sleeping have become activities without sustenance or joy. No miracle comes when one awaits it. I had completely forgotten that. A miracle comes unexpectedly. Ermenonville, like Grünewald, is a place to go mad in. How would I fare in Ireland? It comes from the fog, from the green humidity. What a melancholic climate!

> Make the silence ring in pallid water—
> I am you.
> Sink into the ashes, into silence's image—
> soon I must go.
> You never bring that little bit I want. . . .

December 31

My throat hurts, and my backbone cracks, is that called Spondilosis or Spondilitis? When one grows old, these things get quite unpleasant—beginning 60 said the doctor—but let's say 54, since 5 plus 4 make 9.

Heinrich had a lot to eat this evening and has gone off to the garden. A wet pullover drips in the bathtub. I knit and read *Le Grand Meaulnes* and I talk with Hans from room to room. Soon—very soon, the year 1957 will be over. We talk from room to room and drink wine. It's warm. Things are fine. Soon the world will be one year older. The day before New Year has always seemed strange and ceremonious to me. Will the inhabitants of Ermenonville be loud and boisterous? In Berlin it's better not to go out at this hour—you can get your nose singed by a wayward skyrocket. When the year 2000 comes, our children will be 50, and we'll be dead. Is it likely that our children ever will attain that age with human evolution as it is? This morning the mailman wished us peace for the New Year. I have been full of sorrow, turmoil and rebelliousness these last few days. What has been happening to me? The 99 is rounding into a 100. How I have slipped, grown gray, and gotten ghostly eyes! My neck is withering on my wobbling head. Is so much sadness and confusion necessary first before one can be

comforted by thoughts of death? The tiny needle pricks—are they enough? I've grown tired of my enthusiasm for death. When this gets serious, my teeth begin to rattle. My crazy hoping for a miracle has also lost its force. I've turned around and around in myself, and listened and observed. And I've grown fed up with myself. If I were a man, I would have produced a work of art out of this situation. As I am however—and I wouldn't want it any other way—I've only written drivel. As a 9-year-old I wrote fine bold numbers on this paper, large scrawls and scribbles, and blotches. A smear of ink and butter, a speck of dirt brought from the garden (or out of my nose), dog-ears and marks; the haste to fill a page in almost any manner—because children cannot bear an empty page. When one is able to write all the letters of the alphabet and all the words one knows, then one can write a poem. Imagine that: to write a poem!

Now I've read the first pages of this text: how far-fetched! I did not want to write a novel. I only wanted, if I can remember the beginning correctly, to prove that I am able—when I want—to die. That may be harder than I thought. And unawares, this all has grown so boring. My hysterical inclinations seem to have diminished. Yet still I wonder: what was happening to me? Yes, what indeed? When one grows bored with one's own work, it should be laid aside for something else. That is what I now prefer to do. "And it was in the newspapers, was printed and is sure: a little feather can become five hens" (Hans Christian Andersen).

First epilogue—January 2, 1958

I have never seen a year depart so quietly. Ermenonville is dead silent. We have no clock and didn't know when it was 12. It just stayed dark and quiet outside. I have never experienced New Years this way. We talked from room to room, read and drank wine. We heard nothing. Perhaps no New Year came at all. Yet everywhere one sees new calendars, and therefore it must be 1958. The calendars are always right. The Chinaman in the tobacco shop wished us a Happy New Year yesterday. I am thankful for the old year for everything. . .everything!

Second epilogue—March 2, 1958

Now I finally know what happened to me: ANEMIA—a million little red blood corpuscles had abandoned me. Where had they gone? And the miracle, the miracle that I had so urgently, so heartbreakingly awaited—this miracle was nothing but a cardboard package with 60 glassy capsules full of liver-blood. That's what I swallow now: every day I carefully open up two little capsules and swallow the goods, the blessed liver-blood, so that a million tiny red blood corpuscles will flow back into me.

So there are people who make an elephant out of a fly, five hens out of a feather, or a miracle out of anemia.

Third Epilogue and Conclusion
Ermenonville, July 5, 1958—on the evening before my 42nd birthday.

Now I have carefully copied "News from an Anemic" one more time and have altogether finished with it. In the meanwhile, everything has changed completely. It is summer now and Heinrich has found a female. As I write these final words, the two of them lay on the bed and sleep. It is evening. The roses are in blossom, and the jasmines, whose fragrance I have loved since childhood. Mrs. Heinrich is expecting. Her belly rests upon my foot and I can feel the tiny thrusts of babies pattering in Mrs. Heinrich's belly.

Since December 26, 1957, when I began these entries, 192 days have gone by—their digital sum is 12—whose digital sum is 3. What was written in these entries, including today, consists of 9 days, as I count them. That was not on purpose. Despite the 60 little capsules of liver-blood, my obsession with the number 9 has remained. But in the meantime everything has changed. It's nice to hear the birds sing, see the flowers, pet the Heinrich couple, feel close to one another and love each other, be indispensable to one another. It is beautiful when one million little red blood corpuscles so gradually and peacefully invest a person like a swarm of unseen angels—it's a miracle!

RENEE RIESE HUBERT

UNICA ZURN AND HANS BELLMER

Unica Zürn has a substantial following in Germany and in France, where her key works have been translated. Brinkmann and Bose is bringing out her complete and in large part unpublished writings in five volumes. Her work consists of drawings, etchings, gouaches, poems, and autobiographical texts. Her association with several surrealists, in addition to Henri Michaux, like herself a double talent, provided, as Ruth Henry points out, stimulation she had not experienced in her native Berlin or, more precisely, Grünewald. Her sudden departure from Germany for Paris so as to be close to Hans Bellmer, did much for her budding talent, but little for her mental state. As for other women artists and writers associated with partners who were their seniors in artistic accomplishment, her relation with Bellmer can be read both as a blessing and a disaster, as the interaction of personal and artistic dependencies brought out unbearable conflicts while promoting fruitful collaboration. Contrary to Carrington and Penrose, Zürn lacked the strength to distance herself from her partner and therefore was never able to assert herself personally or even artistically. She prolonged her search for an identity through cruel phases of depression and alienation. However, Zürn's texts and drawings should not be primarily examined in terms of her perilous partnership.

Her poetic works, above all *Hexentexte* (1954) and *Im Staub dieses Lebens* (1980) are labelled anagrams. The anagram, as Pierre Joris points out, is a traditional verbal genre practiced as a game as well as a serious endeavor—an ancient discipline capable of providing a catalyst for poetic rejuvenation. It can function in poetry as well as in the visual arts. Unica Zürn both adhered to and subverted this venerable poetic form subjected to rigorous rules and involving recondite metaphoric conventions. But this subtle and formal genre somehow suited Zürn's purpose. The earlier of the two volumes features extreme hermeticism and poetic intensity. Uncompromisingly rigorous in versification and rhythm as well as in their verbal and syntactical precision these anagrams leave little room for personal deviations, narrative devices, and other extraneous elements. Zürn tightens the text to the utmost without making the least concession to an uninitiated reader. By such rules or devices, which reduce the argument while

excluding direct emotional outpourings, language assumes all the enigmatic and bewitching qualities suggested by the title. Thanks to a structure featuring echoing sound effects and reversible verbal analogies whereby the end of the poem repeats its beginning thus minimizing difference, the whole scheme becomes reminiscent of pieces moving on a chess board.

To appreciate at its fullest the innovative power of Zürn's poetry we need only to situate *Der Staub dieses Lebens* next to *Hexentexte*. This later volume, published posthumously, overtly recognizes its affinities with aphoristic texts by Lautréamont, Arp, and Michaux, where initial playfulness repeatedly leads to emotional insights. *Im Staub dieses Lebens*, less tightly constructed than *Hexentexte*, has more overt relations with Zürn's prose writings, for psychological depth succeeds in manifesting itself by means of apparently impersonal statements. A sense of solitude, often articulated through juxtapositions of nouns, becomes so to speak contagious, for it has the power to pervade objects as well as the persona and readily shifts from one to the other. Solitude fails to overcome its inevitable alienation because it finds that the paths it wishes to pursue have been obliterated or blocked. The self vainly inscribes its name in attempting to delineate a tangible identity. Although Zürn may share some of these features with other poets, it so happens that the anagram carries with it a unique tenseness due to verbal concision leading to a destruction of the barriers separating inner existence from the physical world. She intertextually combines her friends' poetry with remote poetic conventions as well as borrowings from the language of proverbs, from fairy tales, and even from clichés. Frequently, she entraps her readers with familiar and welcoming echoes, but only to deny their expectations, for recognition is invariably subverted and curtailed by paradox. She thus fosters frustration, unavoidably maintains secretiveness, and provides tantalizing clues to no avail because they have already slipped away. An image promising future birth is reversed by the threat of imminent collapse. The reader is constantly reminded of death through evil omens. The omnipresence of dust, a metaphor for death, is proclaimed in the title. Shapelessness and darkness announce the impending dissolution of the self.

Allusions to *Märchen* serve merely to deny the childlike world of fairy tales, for death and deterioration within life invariably prevail over beauty and immortality. Nor do these texts counsel resignation; for anger, despair, even revolt and refusal predominate throughout. Zürn stresses lucidity concerning the human condition, viewed as an unabated nightmare. Indeed, her disillusion has no saving grace whatever, for she finds only alienation and misery in human existence.

We may wonder what if anything this anagrammatic poetry may owe to Bellmer who prefaced and illustrated it. In his theoretical text, *La Petite Anatomie de l'Image* (1978), the painter explains his own practice in a

related if non-verbal genre, notably the games of his provocative doll. He indeed created an object rightly considered the very model of displacement, as expressed through the language of the body, where multiple defunctionalized parts or organs can be added or suppressed in accordance with desire. Bellmer's strategies resemble those of the anagram where the recognizable or the familiar is gradually transformed into a dream or nightmare while losing its grip on the real. As both Bellmer and Zürn play with their viewer or reader the same sort of game of repulsion and attraction it is hardly surprising that we can note strong interactions between Bellmer's and Zürn's artifacts. The painter has undoubtedly initiated the game, but the poet by no means remained a junior member of the partnership let alone a mere follower. She may in fact have remained unaware of the relationship between her texts and the doll, even though anagrams, perhaps even her own, had led Bellmer to an artistic self-discovery about the doll. He reveals something of their relation in his double portrait of Unica and himself entitled *Cephalopodie à deux* (1955). The two artists, combined and even united in the same portrait, are represented nevertheless in different realms and by means of different graphic styles so that their relationship to dream and reality never coincides. As in the portrait, where she is characterized by remoteness, in real life she had neither learned to perceive herself as a person nor as an accomplished artist. The failure to meet represented in the double portrait as well as her sliding toward effacement and mutilation suggests that artistic endeavor could not provide a remedy for inevitable loneliness, in spite of the similar goals of the two partners' trajectory.

Zürn composed several autobiographical texts: *Der Mann im Jasmin, Eindrücke aus einer Geisteskrankheit* (1977), *Dunkler Frühling* (1969), *Notizen einer Blutarmen* (1988), *Notizen zur letzen Krise* (1982). Several of these episodic texts are written under the stress of insanity. Desire for self-expression and self-knowledge accompany her states of sickness with their nightmarish sufferings and hallucinations. As she scrutinizes her alienation and isolation, strong desires to write or draw possess her. She wavers between a programmatic type of writing and doubts about her ability. The relation between writing and disease varies considerably, even if crises usually prompt textual productions. Because she focuses on sickness, the body plays a key role and even assumes the decentered characteristics of her partner's representations.

Bellmer is intensely present in Zürn's autobiographical writings. In addition to the structural displacements and substitutions which inform both her text and his images, intertextuality plays a significant role in both of their works. The erotic behavior of an old woman in the hospital makes the reader think of the exhibitionist gestures of the doll. Zürn herself makes the process fully explicit. We may even suspect that she is designating a

certain universality underlying Bellmer's drawings by discovering in her own encounters the equivalent. The domain of illness and art remain intimately related throughout. Unica not only preempted for her own cure the experiences she related, but also clearly sensed the problematics of representation even during her most threatened stages. Her ultimate goal may have been a form of textualization, since by means of a pen death always remained at arm's distance. The primary materials that memory and perception may have brought within uneasy reach of her pen required effort on her part for their transformation either verbal or graphic. Indeed, the author has even voiced the complaint that too great a familiarity is incompatible with creation. Such an awareness of the mysteries of creativity may have relevance to her handling of anagrams, based perhaps on substitutions taking place in her mind; for instance a Paris policeman might readily turn into a Nazi SS man. Such states of dynamic mental confusion, recurring intermittently in *Notizen einer Blutarmen* (translated by James Phillips) can also be linked to the analogical principle of the anagram which brings forth a renewal out of old texts. This autobiographical narrative reflects about the self, sanity, life, and death, all of them mirroring one another. No specific external event initiates the act of writing. Zürn always remains on the threshold between an old and a new year in so far as her hope for a miracle increases and abates. The child must survive within her all the more so because she feels the frightening impact of the aging process and the lack of an unshattered adulthood. She grasps the paradox of the old woman and the child living side by side within her. A stable frame of mind alternating with psychological states in which obstruction and emptiness as well as boredom and memorization rush to the surface providing the dual matrix of her writing. Paradox and splits in personality may be read as corollaries of each other. Uneventful sleep and anxiety ridden dreams may give birth to powerful images calling for their own reversal. As the undefined miracle seemingly draws nearer, waiting and dreaming tend to merge.

As the year, in keeping with her reductive meditations and the monotonous spacing of the pages, dwindles into insignificance and as the crucial number 99 is about to be replaced by 100, nightfall and shapeless grayness, reminiscent of a Beckettian setting, follow their course while contriving a passive ambush to ensnare boredom. But the writer does not expect an encounter. Her life alternates between Ermenonville with its possible peaceful sunshine and the bleakness of Paris, or in other words half-way between a formulated Utopia and disquieting lucidity. Her miracle, if and when it comes, will provide at most a brief illumination. *"Mein Wunder hat etwas von einem Gesicht,"* undoubtedly a face that can substitute for many others. Waiting may not bring the miracle nearer, but it makes death a more familiar and a better acknowledged presence.

Meditation accounting for oppressive dreams alternates with comments on everyday existence: the cat seeking and needing a companion, the narrator reading *Le Grand Maulnes* or detective stories and communicating with Hans in adjoining rooms. The struggling writer emerges. Although she intends to compose a novel, she soon realizes that her text will never qualify. Then she wonders what it takes to know the letters of the alphabet let alone write a poem. More than anything else, writing, which she began to practice at the age of nine, fosters hope for a miracle.

Zürn painstakingly relates her visits in the company of Bellmer to writers and artists whose portraits he drew. Witnessing the transformations of his models into artworks constituted a deep seated involvement on her part, a double process of identification, another way of establishing a reciprocity between their works. But some of these representations produced the frightening dream of a body severed from its organs but remaining monstrously alive. These disquieting images may perhaps be construed as corollaries of the physical torment and erotic symbolism predominating in Bellmer's work. Intense experiences may indeed warrant and lead to artistic expression, but Zürn's success was often thwarted. She of course blamed herself as well as her status as a woman. She believed that if she had been a man, her experience would have given far more significant results. She describes herself as an anemic woman, perpetually taking pills, and unable to take advantage of the world and develop her talent. Dividing mankind into worshippers and worshipped, she sees herself as belonging squarely in the former category, for she has positioned herself once and for all in the background.

Some of the other texts written within hospital walls show, however, a more active struggle and greater opposition or resilience. Two of these: *Das Haus der Krankheiten, Geschichten und Bilder einer Gelbsucht* (1977 and 86) and *Das weisse mit dem roten Punkt* (1977) are enhanced by visual commentaries. In many of her graphic works the haunted author draws multiple faces and protruding eyes almost independent of a body. Heads are attached to legs; multiplications and suppressions characterize these fantastic figures akin, both graphically and verbally, to Michaux's Meidosems. The drawing reproduced on this page was produced a year later than the text translated by James Phillips. Zürn clearly inscribes within the drawing the fact that at the time she was confined to Ste. Anne's hospital for the mentally disturbed. This drawing pertains indeed to a period of instability. Although in the title of *Notizen einer Blutarmen* she points to physical weakness, she deliberately takes into account moments of confusion. Her multifaced and multifaceted drawing problematizes her nightmarish shuttling between the one to the many, the self and the other. This and other drawings have little in common with Bellmer's powerful gallery of portraits to which she refers. Overlapping and encroaching faces as well as staring

but dislocated eyes, each one combining human and animal characteristics, are paradoxically subjected to a highly decorative design. Eight faces with but a single bird leg to stand on and multiple wings sprouting from unexpected places form a complex, involved but absurd figure. We have the impression that in the drawings more than in her writings she has succeeded in distancing herself from Bellmer and from the anagrammatic practices of the poems translated by Pierre Joris.

Das Haus der Krankheiten has recently been reprinted, but for the first time according to the author's wishes as a simultaneously verbal and visual creation. This autobiographical work, in which the visual is far more than an accompaniment or an illustration, can be read as a prolegomenon to her subsequent writings. Like most of her relatively early texts, it is written in the first person. Later on, when Zürn had learned how to impose more sophisticatedly her identity as narrator, she composed her autobiographical texts in the third person. Experiences in hospitals, symptoms, treatment, paranoid, schizophrenic or hallucinatory experiences, confrontations with doctors, the need for self-expression are somehow mastered by means of language. In *Das Haus der Krankheiten*, which concludes with a return to the outside world, fictionalization frequently surfaces: dreams, intermittent recollections, views from unknown perspectives, echoes from fairy tales and black magic. These flights into the imaginary are framed within textual and of course visual space: for instance, rooms with windows and beds lend themselves to complex and confusing itineraries. The labyrinthine walls of the hospitals represent also the furrows of the brain and and several other parts of the human anatomy which succeed in asserting their disquieting autonomy. Such juxtapositions allow for substitutions between mental confusion and physical disease. Reduced, so she believes, to the role of sacrificial victim, the narrator's fragmented and hypersensitive body is constantly displaced. Time notations, as precise as inscriptions in a diary, stress her constantly renewed vow to retain meditations, reactions, reflections, ephemeral moments of well-being, and crises.

As elsewhere, Zürn focuses relentlessly on two dimensional, childlike drawings. Contours of figures and spaces are accompanied by textual inscriptions that are either exclamatory or descriptive. The first illustration embracing the words of the title shows the multi-storied rectangular *Das Haus der Krankheiten* as an isolated shape. In the complex network of interwoven contours eyes play a crucial role. The narrator's lack of ability to focus induces her to introduce textuality. Eyes within and away from a face, open or closed, radiating like the sun, entangled within a shifting network problematize the field of vision whose softly waving and serpentine outlines evoke the creative process.

If we look, toward the middle of the book, at her rigorously structured representation of the schematic plan of *Das Haus der Krankheiten*, her

elimination of overlappings and entanglements provides a better sense of orientation. Text and image reinforce each other; they solidify or make more tangible an imaginary world by producing a *mise en abyme* of windows and keyholes tantamount to seeing and being seen from without and within. The ambiguity of *Das Haus der Krankheiten,* its conflicting roles and functions, emerge with far greater clarity than ever before. In a single drawing, she shows the floorplan of a house, a dismantled body, and finally a crenelated castle. The enemies show a propensity to vent their fury on parts of the body which, in their turn, can become threatening: nailed hands with eye-like knuckles. The hidden world of mind and body once made visible is made even more dangerous through labelling. Even when we envision the plan as an anagrammatic representation of a tortured body, as the target of innumerable pains and hallucinations, we cannot overlook the importance given to the enigmas: Zürn's allusions to obscure games with perilous rules rely mainly on the strategic place given to the oracular number 99—3 x 33. The numbers and the letters added to meandering lines issuing primarily from the "Kabinette der Sonnengeflechte" counteract the schematic process of representation initiated by the circumscribed contours of the house.

Bellmer, in spite of the sufferings he willy-nilly inflicted on her, not only helped her on her way toward artistic production, but by introducing her to surrealism, he provided her with the means to resist and even to make the best of her confinement to an asylum. The surrealists' insistence on and positive evaluation of the irrational encouraged Zürn to stand up so to speak for the visions and hallucinations that obsessed her. Her graphics as well as her texts deliberately and perhaps proudly turn away from the banal shapes of reason and reality to those of an unbridled imagination. Thanks to surrealism she was able as an artist and a writer to make the best possible use of a precarious mental condition.

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BARBARA MOR
TWO POEMS

ROBBED / and when you come home you find that everything is gone

when they rob you they leave a nail in the door.
they drive a nail in your forehead that means you will be
robbed.
they hammer a long thin nail into the wooden frame of your
front door and that means rob this one. this one is next
a nail thin as the penises of rats.
a long wire insert in your name, it pierces names. the
invisible lines radiate from rental bodies, fingers
dicks silences point at your life, and wheels
roll over with big erasures, many gray fists

AND WHEN YOU COME HOME YOU FIND YOU WERE
ON THE LIST

and then they park somewhere, they watch through one-way
windows
they sit back with satisfaction and smoke and wait
until you are observed to leave. then they turn the
ignition on rodent engines, or if they are parked on a hill they
release the brakes and silently glide down a street
into your throat.
the bone is easy to pop. break
eyes, walk through glass walls. push
flesh no one locked and enter rooms like a body who waits
for it. few belongings but taken care of (no bed
phone car VCR couch washer drier) or slide
down open mouths almost without gloves. they

get into you like that
they see you are neat. toilet paper, books. many
stacked boxes (mutilated joints mss. earth history of poems, war) the
attachment of time to collations of flesh ink objects
you sleep on the floor. they spread
pubic hairs and stare in, looking for vast secrets
of momma, daddy. their long thin fingers open desk drawers
notebooks closets of politics, hangers. naked
cups of coffee lovers fingernails blankets typewriters radios. they
extract a life's work through your nailed skull tongue
door, asshole. this is not personal

AND WHEN YOU COME HOME YOU FIND THAT YOU ARE GONE

upon leaving, they remove the nail. it is gripped, twisted with
dark pliers pull out long thin evil length from your existence
there is a fresh hole in the wood then.
there is a large hole in your mind then. and they form a
wound made in this door of somewhere blood is pouring out, money
leaks from it, thoughts paper screams lines flow out from your eyes
and future circuitry words abandoned in the alleys outside
trashed on file burned
beyond footsteps rat sperm dead nails in the dumpster
(and that means they are done with you forever)
when they pull the nail out forever that is when it really
starts to hurt

THE ONE WHO RECEIVED THE NAIL
a body who gets nailed, that's it

[UNTITLED]

it enters a mouth thrusts is chewed and suck comes it
is bitter the foot kicks you away the hands reach for
you. this is love. we love

a huge cloud gathers in back rooms a deal negotiations
of thunder & needles (thunderous) sharp speeds of rain the
sulphurous rubber of the body rolls up & down in black sheets
we were each other. in dreams.
we wanted to be. it was darkness & the clocks read
daytime, numbers of light entered everywhere, thrusting
being eaten & sucked, the
mouths spoke of hungry life, menus of ice & screams
flames, as daily windows as dark(est) views
time is wound up to adjust to this clock, which
was always noon as a beautiful hunger, feast
of air swallowing all, bodies of flesh & black teeth
tongues, borders of hallucinations criminal
windows of clear nitrogen
beyond them the bodies of clouds roll by on
endless rubber winds, fortunately, encased in
metal, & going too fast
life enters the mouth thrusts is chewed & sucked
comes, the foot kicks you away
the sperm is bitter, like spit of god, a huge
emptiness
lying naked in a room of sulphur

AUGUST KLEINZAHLER
THREE POEMS

POEM

She's flipping like a marlin
in lamplight, the air above her
thrashed to a foam

that eddies awhile
and then drifts down to crackle
and glow on her belly.

The one eye's wild
with three shrieks inside it,
the other adrift in a vapor.

Her breathing's chased
with tiny, disembodied cries
percolating

to her lips from another place;
and *click:*
the reel switches to fast-forward,

whistling through her head.
She goes slack,
taken by an undertow

until *click:* a string
of broken snarls, cloacal, a necklace
strung with shards,

then a great heaving, her body
arched toward some lodestar—

and she's released.

THE PARK

Jimmy the Lush,
looking rough in the shadows and dapple
of light, stares down at the ground
as his dogs take command

of the boundaries,
nuzzling turds and the air around,
snouts jerking like marionettes.
He starts off slow,

nursing a Pepsi, and keeps to his post
through the morning.
He looks almost natty, frayed Ivy League,
compared with the guys

on the corner, wasted already and screaming
about which one goes
to the Arab's next to buy more beer
and some smokes.

Then comes The Talker,
muttering softly, who finds his spot
under the loquat
and fretfully grooms in the shade.

His hat could be a military beret.
But it's far too big
and he wears it wrong, puffed
high on his head like a derby

collapsed at the edges.
They usually detonate round about two,
Jimmy first, somehow
being the senior. A pint's in him now,

high-test, and he's sore
as the dickens about something.

Once it was the mayor, once the Jews,
now it's the whole stinking planet.

The sun posts west
of the radio tower and The Talker's off
on his *possessed by space-villain X* routine,
flogging his rotors, up on his feet,

while Jimmy rails on about the ozone,
the redwoods—those bastards. . .
He spits out the *ba* sound in *bastards,*
his voice growing louder

as his breaths get short
till there's final shriek

and then silence.

CRUNCHING NUMBERS

Assault plasma star launch
The muezzin's call to prayer anthrax Apache raid
Slam mangroves duel ranger excel
Its delicate, wavering airs skewer rocket Nintendo
Hunt rapiers stun flaming debris
Blister agents propel foxbats *so delicate the hour before dawn*
Mirage strafes laser turbo fury
Reactor vessels boil-in-the-bag lacquered&flaked with gold
It resembles no other music Raytheon swing-wing
Have-Nap Popeye punch through date groves coral reefs
The silkworm takes a direct hit

Unless perhaps the nightingale turret spray leopard berms

Glancing blow *in lands where nightingales*

Rain down bouncing betty red, Tru-spokes, louvers&air

Seldom are heard pestle&waterwheel kick ass

Copper flasks of rosewater grip sidewinders grunts

In the iwan's shadows *triggering the failure*

Of Asian monsoons wild weasel *all mud and blood down there*

Thiodiglycol topple Aries denial

Come gargling from froth-corrupted lungs the heron turns

To grab hold of the cloud passing by

Storage tanks full of butane sherbet positions Hezbollah

Lozenges of basbousa and baklava strike package

Lynx impala *one morning a carpenter's pet monkey* centrifuged

Cormorants, sea cows and terns with light

Collateral damage *Saddam rewarded several of his generals*

With duck farms and Mercedes uranium hexaflouride

Scented with myrrh the lion leapt onto the gazelle's back

Tearing his neck blanched almonds attrite

How watered silk took the calligrapher's ink cut off flotilla

Rake minaret thin slices of roast kid

Basted with pomegranate smart bombs Staasi agents bridges&rail

There was once a certain venerable dervish

Jaguars sirens titanium-tipped tracers *caused the market*

To rebound MiGs in the dust of Nineveh, at the gates of Ur

Saffron gathered from fields of crocus alert mosaics

Sunday has been designated baby milk

Phantoms in flames

Azan

DEAN YOUNG

THE FIRST TIME & THE TIME BEFORE THAT

I'm 17 & she's straddled me
on her Daddy's dentist chair
& the tsunami's about to hit
the quiet seaside town
where in the preceding calm
scenes of typical domesticity
take on a blatant poignancy:
the dog asleep & twitching in the road,
eggs nestled in egg cartons beside the milk,
the dentist hosing the hydrangea

until out on the freeway the machine
that paints the dividing lines
goes lashingly berserk
& the dentist grabs his gun from the wall
shouting, My daughter, my practice, my drill

& years later, when she draws a bath,
instead of water, eyes will gush from the spout,
my eyes because she said she loved them
because this is how the memory works,
lyric & monstrous

like Meret Oppenheim's mink cup & saucer,
I'm bringing the cup to my lips,
I'm sipping through wet fur
& above me the long purple patch like a glimpse
of the pure robe & a blank patch
like a bird opening its wings
after some's erased the bird

& I'm 12 & watching the nuns enter the surf
on their private beach above the bird sanctuary
in Stone Harbor, New Jersey,
completely shrouded in black bathing slippers
even black slippers like ballet slippers
& the sea spumes & knocks them joyously down
& swallows.

Small black swirls within white heaving & green

& already I love Botticelli,
the *Birth of Venus* which I've seen in a book
about gods, her left nipple peaking
through the wrist that covers it, *through*
& drapery sailing away from her crotch

but I love the Metal Men more
which I'd buy from the blind man's store,
handing him a one, saying, This is a one,
thinking, This is a ten, this is a twenty
while he feels out the change,
the rack of Batman, Flash, the Human Torch
beside the tiers of women's licked mouths
mouthing my name through the brown wrappers,
sometimes just the orgiastic hair

& in the pages of my comic, the elemental heros
stumble & recede, stumble & crest:

Tin: flimsy but good in a pinch,
Iron: the strongest, defeated by magnets & rust,
Mercury: useless, inflated with anger,
Gold: brilliant but soft, Lead:
thuggish, molding himself into a dome

& Platinum, except for the welds & rivets
Platinum's female, shining & naked,
best of conductors, last to be made,
costliest,

& in love with her inventor
    who clenches his wrenches each time she approaches—
        how could this happen? he's lost the plans—
who sends them on missions & they always return
    dented, immutable, unalloyed.

PAUL VIOLI
THE CURIOUS BUILDER

A dream in which a butterfly crashes
through a stone wall is a warning
that you are no longer immune to flattery.

To dream that you are asleep means you will
soon receive gifts from people you detest.

To be told you often cackle loudly in your sleep
means you are not a Master of Indifference.

A dream of rotten cactus signifies
that you have somehow offended the dead.

To receive an invitation in a dream
is the mark of an intelligent dreamer.

Short dreams are the dear price of a hectic life,
long dreams no compensation for a dull one.

To dream you are taller than usual
indicates that you are not very healthy
and may soon be attacked.

Following a dream in which someone empties
his pipe by tapping it against your forehead,
leave your bed and run, flee your house,
your village, never to return again.

Any dream that is a foe of sympathy
is not a source of magic.

When a dream's music is sweet,
give all you own to the poor;
when it is harsh, leave all you own
on the doorsteps of the rich.
Then, in either case, you must flee
your home, your village,
never to return again.

A dream of lambs bounding over rainbows:
this is where the songs of fiends arise.

Even to Artemidorus, a dream
of eating uncooked corn
does not easily reveal its secret.

If you dream your house is full
of jovial foreigners, imperturbable,
look-alike heathens
who speak an incomprehensible tongue
and who refuse to leave
no matter how many gifts you throw at them,
then when you wake
know that there will be beauty
all around you, peace within your heart,
—before you must quietly depart,
forsaking your house, your village,
never to return again.

But if dreaming your way
through your own house,
or any familiar place, you open
a cabinet or door
that you, somehow, never noticed before,
and enter a room or a corridor
that leads to another,
and yet another,

and you find yourself
not in a parlous maze

but a maze of openings, exploring
an expanding mansion
that must have been there all along,

Then you should welcome these dreams
as their blooming enjambment
welcomes you, and like a bank president
who takes a look around one morning
and declares: "Let's convert this place
into a restaurant!"—you can expect
one of your better days.

After such dreams, whether
he wants to or not,
a man prospers, reassured
that even in the reign of Bogus I,
enough pleasure and worth remain
for someone to finally slide
into bed again
with gratitude waiting behind closed eyes
like starlight reflected in black ice.

Or, if his heart be overfull
and repose impossible,
if his head still throngs
with all he profited yet still craves,
he must forget about sleep
and dreams, but rise again
and declare:

I, Paul Violi, being of sound mind
—Say, the sound of skidmarks
formed where the view across the Hudson
suddenly offers the faces
of Frank Lloyd Wright,
D.W. Griffith, and Ezra Pound
carved in the Palisades.

Or the skidmarks themselves
as much astonishment's own shadow
as Icho's brushstroke,
lead the way back to Manhattan
through Suburbia and the footfalls
of Tyrannosaurus Bronx.

There, along wasted shoreline
and burned-out piers,
Curiosity—what The Worthies
called "Desire's fingertips"—
finds a way out
of another wreck—tangles
of melted steel, red rust,
stumps and slow water—
in time to conduct
the chainlink music of concertina wire
and shredded plastic in a freezing wind,
and set the dome of evening
on rooftop corners
squinched with dirt and sand.

Like water, almost knowing
where it's going, it leads
along a maze of downtown streets
until under the absolute beauty
of the dark blue night
you must stop and declare:
—"Who? Me? No, I was just looking
for this restaurant.
It's around here somewhere."

It used to be a bank
and it smells like a basement,
a dungeon in bloom.
Uneven plank and slab flooring,
cinemascope windows,
sky-washed marble-plated walls,

one vast dim room
that brightened as it rose
to a tiled ceiling spanned
by iron beams painted silver:
the kind of place where Mary Magdalene
first laid eyes on
"Blinkers" the Phoenician.

It's on a corner.
I've been there before,
two or three evenings,
and each time it had changed,
expanded into another room
furnished the same haphazard way:
jammed with mismatched tables
and chairs, storage room couches,
faded carpets and crimson drapes,
wormwood and brass,
blue willow bowls
arrayed behind the mahogany bar,
griffins and grape vines
carved in gold-frame mirrors
hung too high to reflect anybody,

and waiters who have to swat
away the plants to find you.
A gang of waiters
so insultingly polite
Have A Nice Day
is tattooed on their tongues.

"Today's Special, Phoenix Wing,
might be a bit over your head, Sir.

"Need I explain the pot-luck
Thyestean Menu, Sir?

"The turtle never stops growing
until the day it dies.
Unlike some of us. . .eh, Sir?

"Or, perhaps to do justice
to your favorite metrical foot,
the Pterodactyl?

"Might you care for bread, cold meat,
fruit, and a porridge of spelt?
Or something not so frugal?"

No, I'll try the peacock from Samos,
hazel hens from Phrygia, and. . .
cranes from Media, kid from Abracia,
tunnyfish from Chalcedon,
lampreys from Tartesus, whitefish
from Pessinus, swordfish from Rhodes,
oysters from Tarentum, scallops
from Chios, parrot fish from Cilicia,
and throw in some nuts from Thasos,
dates from Egypt, and, yes,
acorns from Iberia.

. . .There goes the waitress
with the streambed eyes. . .

Every order served
on commemorative plates
honoring the orotund and congenial:
Rabelais, Samuel Daniel,
The Wife of Bath, Aretino;
Eleanor of Aquitaine, Falstaff,
Coleridge, Gibbon, Orson Welles,
Catherine de Medici, Mama Cass.

Every table a hive of conversation,
except the nearest, where
amid contending anecdotes, one diner

declares: "You think *that's* disgusting?
Listen to this!

One night, after months
in a northwestern province,
I'm staring up through the mosquito net
hung high, slung low from the poles.
It forms a sort of tent
within a tent. . .

browns and greens, light and dark,
cavernous folds, all peaks
and droops and dim exaggerations
where my last waking moment
flies off like a weary bat
in a cathedral.

It's merely the fever coming back,
dengue, seeping through me, cold
and empty and strange,
I shiver in the sagging cot,
snuff a candle, squash a cigarette
in a bottle-cap ashtray
and fall asleep.

But for how long I don't know
before the nausea hits,
wakes me on the lunge,
hauls me to the side, where
face pressed into the netting,
I start to heave, too weak to care.
—Some enormous creature I was,
stuck in a tarpit, mind
awhirl like a crippled fly.

The next time I wake up
I feel fine, oblivious
to what happened,
except I can't open my eyes.

The lids are stuck, glued shut.
Cheeks stiff, nose clogged,
it's me, with the netting
pasted over my face—Smithereen's clown.

The joke's on me.
I peel it off, gently, like a mask.
And as convincing as, say,
The Shroud of Turin,
the image snared in the threads
—Gimme an H! Gimme a U!
Gimme an M, Gimme an I, Gimme an L!
Gimme another I! and a T and a Y!
Whaddaya get?

—"Who? Me? I don't get it.
The only thing the Shroud of Turin
reminds me of is the tablecloths
in this place.
Every dream, every journey
is a digression, but from what
I don't know: Dreaming or not,
on our better days we're tracing
the same immanent pattern of fascination.
The other night, for example,
I'm coasting down these long halls,
entranced by commonplace things,
I run my fingertips along threads
of silver and gold in the walls,
casually asking
which is memory, which desire.
Then, opening a side door
I happen to notice, I enter
and there it is:

vast, hollow, Everestian heights.
There it is: Loss.
A lurid, pendulous light,
stale gold fumes draped

above an ocean of dust, silt
so fine a raindrop would float on it.
A wonder of annihilation
or an annihilated wonder.

And in the far distance
two wandering figures appear,
dressed not like explorers
but plodding tourists
who have found hell a disappointment
and want a refund,
who have no sense
of what has been lost,
but still think the bus
must be around here someplace.

A mile away from me in the dunes
and yet I can hear one of them declare:
"Would you believe it,
that even Nothingness
could be so full of itself."

I'm still trying to figure
that one out days later
when I walk in here and see
in the pargeting above the door
a line from Fitzgerald's Odyssey:
"Charmed out of time, we see
no life can be hid from our dreaming."

I almost have that one figured out
when I hear an imperial fingersnap
and I'm greeted
by The Waiters' Serenade:

"Chew on ice, eat a smile.
    Chew on smoke, dream awhile.

(Sing it Jimmy Boy,
Sing it for the hoi polloi)

Chew on ice, let it fade. . .
Chew on smoke. . .the life you made."

I almost figure that one out
when—another fingersnap—
I'm led through a maze
of continuous renovation,
tables and scaffolds and workers
and I'm seated just in time
below a great old mirror
flaked with black-rot
where a long-sought image
of all I've loved and made
and hope to keep
is about to finally burn through silver
and drop right into my plate.

Of course there is a slight wait,
during which I order a cocktail
or two, watch the construction,
offer some advice, grow impatient,
skim a magazine, write a few letters,
send them off, skim a novel,
and am about to complain
when the waitress arrives,
apologizes for the confusion
and delivers my mail.

Dear Reader,
Since the reign of Bogus I,

Dear Wordsmith,
We are off to hunt truth and rabbits,
so saddle your ox!
We'll take the shortcut again,
through swamp and paradox

To Whom It May concern,
    It is with great regret
that we inform you

Dear Chump,
    You will undoubtedly want to be there
when Gullibility and Greed renew their vows

Beloved Patron,
    It is with a heavy head and
shriven heart that I take pen in hand

Dear Applicant,
    The subject may appear remote at first,
but Creative Freedom versus Social
Responsibility is the question we wish
to explore with you today

Dear Parent,
    Was it mere pedantry to reject those
ransom notes for your loved ones
because of the grammatical errors
they contained or were higher principles

Dear Investor,
    By the time you read this letter
I will be gone. I have run away.
My plan to invest your savings
in the manufacture of styrofoam coffins
was, I admit, a sham; and the implant
that would allow the common man
to convert his big toenail
into a television screen

Dear Subscriber,
    In the latest edition
of The Illustrated Dictionary
under the entry for "nonplus,"
an old coot frantically sweeps

a pile of dust across trackless desert
right up to your feet
and without stopping, without
even looking up at you, declares:
"Out of my way, you desperate bastard!"
    Now for only a few dollars a month
this and many more memorable

Say Hey, Peewee!
    Forswore hoity-toity melee?
Bandstand hubbub so-so?
Zoot-suit heyday undone?
Juju hodge-podge humdrum?
Eenie-meanie payday? Holus-bolus shit-fit?
    If this be the case, then we
strongly recommend Mayday! Mayday!
Backtrack: Waylay Lulu, murmur Tufu,
kowtow paxwax booboo,
maintain bedspread handstand

Dear Contestant,
    Congratulations! Your chance to win
the dreamhouse of a lifetime, to live
on the edge of rampant transformation
is at your fingertips.
    Just pick up your pen

Dearest Occupant,
    This building has been condemned STOP
Your constant delays leave us no
alternative STOP Vital services will be
terminated STOP To facilitate your
immediate departure we advise you
to avail yourself of the next

To The Reader

Behold once more with serious labor here
Have I refurnished out this little frame,

Repaired some parts defective here and there,
And passages new added to the same,
Some rooms enlarged, made some less than they were
Like to the curious builder who this year
Pulls down, and alters what he did the last
As if the thing in doing were more dear
Than being done, and nothing likes that's past
    For that we ever make the latter day
The scholar of the forme, and we find
Something is still amiss that must delay
Our business, and leave work for us behind.
As if there were no Sabbath of the mind.
And howsoever be it well or ill
What I have done, it is mine own I may
Do whatsoever therewithall I will.
    I may pull down, raise, and re-edify
It is the building of my life the fee
of Nature, all the inheritance that I
Shall leave to those which must come after me
And all the care I have is but to see
These lodgings of my affections neatly drest
Wherein so many noble friends there be
Whose memories with mine must therein rest.

TERESA DEL CONDE
TERESA SERRANO

(Tr. from the Spanish by Esther Allen)

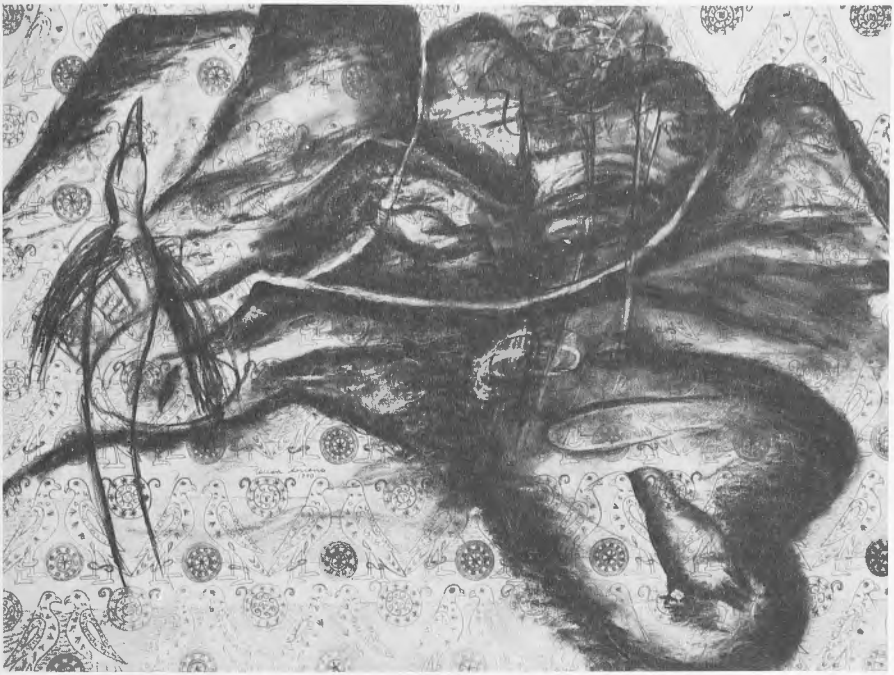
Teresa Serrano has been a relatively recent revelation for critics and students of art in Mexico, as well as for the artists who are her contemporaries. Though she has been painting and drawing for some time now, she was, for several years, unwilling to enter the formidable competition of the Mexican art world, which is vital, polemical and exacting, but somewhat obstructive to the spontaneous emergence of new voices. She plunged into the fray when she felt herself to be in full possession of her own voice, not before.

Teresa Serrano began to make her presence felt in national salons, biennials and gallery shows about six years ago. At that point she had already had various shows in galleries in New York and California. She has won unquestionable recognition. However, her artistic physiognomy has materialized not from exhibitions and propaganda but through the emotional chords struck by her works.

A few months ago she showed a splendid series of large drawings in an important exhibit organized by the Museum of Modern Art of Mexico City. Some of these works are being reproduced here. In addition to evincing a fine hand for drawing and a distinctively poetic aptitude for merging oppositions, Serrano is a painter who unites strength and tenderness. This is evident in the delicate elegance with which she approaches certain of her iconographic motifs: birds, ornaments, the words she likes to inscribe on her works. Her delicacy is precise, paradoxical as that may sound, and it is joined to an impulse (that only seems contrary) to daub, sketch, and shade by means of full gestures that seem to grow out of her whole body.

In Mexico, Teresa Serrano studied with two notable painters: Carlos Orozco Romero and Javier Arévalo. The journeys she has made, the paintings of all periods she has seen, her close contact with the art being produced now, all make up her roots which go from Altamira to Post-Modernism, from New York and Castilla la Vieja to the outskirts of Oaxaca or Morelia.

TERESA SERRANO
FOUR DRAWINGS

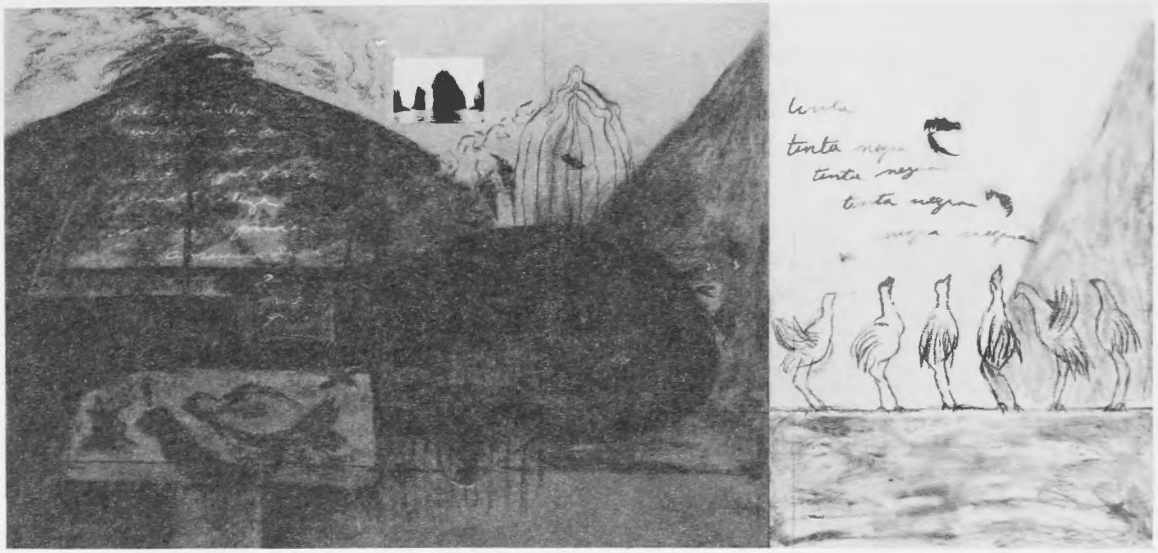


Untitled, 1990

Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Paper,
120 cm x 120 cm

Untitled, 1990

Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Paper,



Untitled, 1990

Collage: Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Paper, and Plastic, 3 meters x 120 cm

Untitled, 1990

Charcoal, Ink, Pencil on Amate Paper,
2 meters x 130 cm

PETER REDGROVE
EIGHT ALCAMEOS

THE CYCLOPEAN MISTRESS

"A man is a god in ruins. . ." This sentence was written beneath a musical stave in black on a greenboard. A poster of skeletons hung on a nail. An old photograph taped to the stationary cupboard showed a sculptor in a smock, with a noble brow and the expression of a Caesar; in his left hand he held the limp mask of an idiot, clay-hued and rubbery. Several diplomas in frames hung on the wall. I thought them more appropriate to a private office; the teacher's qualifications were not in question. I had been told that she had only one eye. . .

But I was not prepared for the teratism that walked in, her schoolmaster gown billowing. This one had no need of expedients to control her fourth-formers! Indeed she had one eye, but it was in the centre of her forehead, an inch above the bridge of her nose. She made me feel quite alcoholic with the buzz of it.

Once I had got used to the cyclopean feature, the rest had great beauty. The hair was raven black, and flowed like some perfumed and healing balsam down to her shoulders. Her skin was clear and glowing, her figure lissom, her movements quick, agile and intelligent. I had come to enquire about my daughter's progress in school. What the Cyclopean mistress told me was "She is well towards approaching unified vision." I could see that she weighed her words, but I wonder what this phrase meant for the future of my child? Would her eyes fuse, too, and crown her nose?

I had expected an older woman with a handsome black patch, like Wotan's. Then I thought of Ancient Greece, and wondered whether the schoolmistress was a classical scholar? Was she, with her Eye, the offspring of the Beginning, when Earth coupled with the Sky? I had read about her three one-eyed brothers in Homer, and in Hesiod how they made thunderbolts for Zeus. But I had not heard rumour of a daughter of that coupling. If a god of this kind were ruined—how?—would the eyeball not split in two and drop down into divided sockets on either side of the nose, leaving nothing of that unified vision but a worried frown?

ARMY OF MICE

I woke up gasping. I had somewhere in a dream lost my breath, and losing my breath, lost the dream, and trying to breathe woken myself up. It was a nightmare. I could remember no succubus sitting on my chest. I had not been twined in intercourse with any bestial figment. But then I started remembering my dream.

In my dream I had been asleep, and I woke. I began to sit up, and to adjust the eiderdown. It shivered and squeaked under my grasp and I understood that the quilted coverlet was composed of the bodies of living mice. I looked down at the bedding which covered me, and I saw that it was studded like a city night with yellow eyes. I tried to throw it off, but it parted to my hands, and then came surging up at me. I flung myself out of the bed and my feet touched cold stone flooring. I tried to find my slippers. A pair of slippers stood under the bed. I tried to pick them up and they were mice. I touched the lamp shade on the bedside table and tried to find the switch, but it was the tiny teeth of mice, and the whole table gleamed with eyes.

My feet touched a carpet. It wriggled and clasped me with its teeth. It was mice. I took my dressing-gown from behind the door and put it on. My body gleamed with the eyes of mice. The dawn began to come up and showed me clothed in grey fur, covered in eyes. I pulled the curtain. Mice that had been clinging to mice by claw and fur, tail and teeth to make the warm heavy drapes, left hold and dropped to the floor in hundreds to let the thin dawn light into the room. I looked at the soft grey clouds in the sky, and they opened all their sparkling eyes and were mice. I felt my face with my hand: it was covered with a soft stubble like mouse-fur, and as I touched it it wriggled and I passed my hand between mice. I looked at my hand and my hand looked at me out of mice-eyes, I looked back at it out of my face of mice-eyes, and the room became gradually taller and broke up into thousands upon thousands of identical rooms—as my head broke up and began to run on mouse-claws down over my body which was running away over the floor to all four corners of the room.

ANNUAL EVENT

Pamela, in a green dress, came and sat down in the water, to show us. We blessed her for it, and applauded heartily. I found the hotel at last, in which the conference was being held, the solid and staid old Edwardian, the Metropole. Discreet notices printed in a whisper found me the great ballroom. Bowls of water were brought in, and the delegates, removing trousers and knickers, sat down in the bowls in a silence of profound concentration. It was cold water, with ice-cubes. Then bowls of warm water were brought in, substituting for the others. I counted eighty delegates. It was the annual pile-shrinking competition.

HAMLET

In the pub a woman suddenly dashes a pint of Guinness over her own white and frilly-bloused front. Hamlet, who has experience in talking to ghosts, is amazed. Is this a fetish, or a ghost-exercise? The latter, I think: notice that her eyes are closed. It is an event that might more readily occur in a dream, some deluge of the spiritually-alert body, both desired and feared, ghost-shaped. Now she is savouring the sensations. In a moment she will open her eyes and inspect the copious external stains which splash and spread in the pattern-resultant of all the forces in the universe dwelling in that blouse at this moment of impact. Later she will discuss the matter with her male partner, who is at the moment giving her action room, as he is frozen in astonishment. Meanwhile the complex clean-ironed cotton recording-instrument sensitive to vectors inner and outer that go to make up its display, the draught from the swing-doors, the thumping of her heart, the field of electromagnetism held in the crosswork of silky threads, transforms in an instant to a time-warp printout of these local and universal influences—something for dwarfish time-bandits to steal off her back. Moreover, the presence or utterances of ghosts can affect the wordage of this giant stain, which is also an emblem, a bringing out into the open of her menstruation, which this act has just started. The mantic or divinatory characteristics are identical to the ink splashes, sand-trays, tea-leaves, sfumage, écremage, decalcomania and powdering of clairvoyants and surrealists. In addition the magnificent nose of the ferment arises around us all black as the Guinness itself, but invisible, and as powerful an aid to

the genius as years of scripture itself read aloud out of Guinness-coloured books to boys in dusky churches in which their white surplices seem to glide in procession like foam down a gullet.

Now this pint has been laid out by this lady, it is a flat pint, like a sliced tree-trunk showing its rings over which balsamic sap creeps, except for its perfume, which swells in all perceptible dimensions through the room, warmed by her chest and by our astonishment. She has extracted the bouquet, using the laboratory of her gifted chest, now dark as Sheba's. Guinness got laid; it is a fast partner; and love-smells fill the bar. Now she strips the blouse off, shakes it, cracking it like a whip, and hangs it out to dry on a neighbouring chair-back. "I'm sure Bobby's coming after all," she says to her companion, and takes out her purse, goes up to the bar in her bra and orders another round. She is served without question. Her companion repositions the chair nearer the radiator, so the blouse will dry faster. It is Hamlet himself who acts thus considerately, who happened to be sitting with this woman who understands fluids and their transformative use a degree better than poor Ophelia with her unfermented posies. As the lady returns to her seat, Hamlet leads a round of applause among the habitués. "That's the way to talk to ghosts, all right," says Hamlet, who also enjoys dressing in white and black. Meanwhile, the pattern on the steaming blouse begins to sketch a Veronica resembling Hamlet's Father's beetlebrowed face—contracted there more in sorrow than in anger.

THE PATH

The brimstone full of its aspect. A fragility of tenure among the bolts of sulphur; deep in the yellow mine, an accidie. The molten element has set in gulf-like heiroglyphs. Her guards lay dead and her clothes dripped blood. "Let us hide in the sulphur mines," she said, and handed him a lamp. They walked through the great wooden doors into the cellar as if they were beating a path into the sun.

AFTER THE FUNERAL

A huge rainwater gargoyle with the face of a horse. Putting one's mouth to the cold, sweet flute in the rainy graveyard for the funeral of an old woman whose cheeks were cool and fragrant to kiss and whose robes always smelled faintly of lily of the valley. Afterwards, tea, in the huge gargoyle of a house with its chairs of a deep raisin colour. I was upset, distressed, but a remark made by my partner cheered me. She was staring at the chairs. "Raisin," she said, "Raisin' up," and she giggled, "Resurrection, a sign!" and she waved her arm around her head. A distinct odour of lily of the valley came from her armpit, and I wondered whether smells were inherited.

SUNDAY WALK OF THE ALCHEMIST

Deep soft collisions in the air. Like a haunted train. Haunted by the exquisite beauty of the materials. Not casual and not opportunistic. The sacramental function of suffering projected on to matter itself. The black and white threads pulsing in the loom. You and your magic sound created by the mere fact of the body working. For everything on earth has its sferics. I hear a ghostly picture of your vulva unfolding. A womb-sound surrounds us. The barks of the trees are wet and running with wet like enormous alchemical vessels. Weather-response spells out a tree-alphabet. The rising and setting of planets spell out their creatures on the earth. Here, in this wood's centre a great stone, with apple, ash and holly. They make a womb-sound like a vulva unfolding, spelled CNT. Ah, that's it, the registration number of the car that brought us here. CNT 666 F.

THE VILLANELLE OF THE LITTLE DUCK

I.

A very subtle deepening over and above the sensation and the pang which made itself felt principally in my neck, a couple of inches below my ears, where the bony part stops. Is this where the eustachian tubes are impeded, or the carotid plexus stells? As I deepened into it I met poor P.V's bankruptcy ascending, but I switched off recollection and floated down past it without touching or adhering. Tat was asleep. Having woken and got up, I looked over the banisters and noticed that my magical walking-stick had become magical. But it is February winter, and the green, even the traces of January, that hue and spirit, has now and for the whole of this month sunk out of sight, the Cornish Persephone not being expected for at least eight long weeks more. Where does my stick want to go?

II.

In the green room, with ginger hair. She has her arm in a plaster cast, and she has carefully lacquered her nails scarlet, because the cat was so ginger on his green. He stretched his back on the green grass and looked at her goldenly. He was a blood-eater in the wide green: a mere mouse, headless in a green thicket, so red a lamb within the green, its head elsewhere. Ginger sizzling on the green rises and to the thicket paces to taste the headlessness and the red with the ginger of itself. The patient watches from her bed the greenness of the lawn gingered by the cat playing with scarlet.

III.

"The villanelle of the little duck. . ." He stopped writing for a moment and turned into a stone over which the brook flowed and hunched its garment cool around his neck, and a rainbow croaked out of its collar. A stone. Already. The quiet thrum of water shook the rainbow. A butterfly sip sip investigated the stone for a bead of water. I found one in my own eye, turned my head and offered the eye like a flower to the butterfly. The villanelle of the little duck. I had particularly enjoyed the Hall of Ships, into which they had got the Queen Mary, dry. As we were returning, on the station platform in the crowd, there was a woman with a pram. Her baby was fiddling with some typewritten documents. Suddenly and with a seraphic smile the child handed me a sheaf of them, headed RESEARCH SOLUTIONS. The woman smiled at me and wiped a tear away.

IV.

Myself and another man had mastered our periods. We had done this by tucking a large folio book under our arms, each of us. It was the colour

and pattern of a handkerchief that had been used for a nosebleed, quite slim, but with large pages, like a sketchbook, elephant size, that looked tie-dyed. Previous to this we had suffered badly from PMT, which was like a large white empty space, a marquee made of an immense rubber, inside which one could not breathe, and felt spiky and glittering, in the swollen stance of snowmen. Now however we did not have to worry about this, since we had our bloodstained books. Now it was a simple matter to join any company; I went into a meeting of playwrights, and we got on very well.

PHILOSOPHER AND SKIN

I.

She had legs like earth-stairs. She spilt gravy into her lap. She sat in a written chair. I felt her wings flare out in her body like swooping Dracula. She was the night-side of the dove. I had drunk water fresh from a thunderstorm. Take a look in the mirror, Eden. Greeting the beasts by urine-gesture. Butterflies from the North.

II.

Leylines like stars with their rays reflected on the earth's surface. The craters on the Moon as if a hammer had been taken to a crystal ball. My body communicating its changes to my nose through the chimney of my clothes; I inhale these messages and return answers by sliding my changed saliva downwards. Plenty of wet girls in the mountains, clothed in goddess-skin of mist and waterfall.

III.

I smell my meal cooking. Its savour winds up through the Vee of her blouse. The anticipation of her skin makes me salivate. Winds up through the Vee of her blouse from the kitchens below, she ornaments this staircase with pearls. Through this white tunnel come the vaporous essays, the innocent alchemy. The pearl necklace hanging between the visible and invisible realms. The throat, the beach of invisible tides. The monthly laboratories, the pelvic silver beaten out. "Ant" or "Lizard" in her mouth greets the beast by inner gesture, "Dog" with as close an approximation to the beast's smell as a human can give. Pretty close. Therefore are the beasts friendly.

IV.

Not an independent subject confronting an objective, alien world, but rather the so-called subjectivity, the ego or inner sanctum, and nature, and other people, and the whole world, emerge from a common ground, embracing both humans and nature. This state of fruitful death, the kore dwelling in both worlds, and passing from one to the other, dwelling also in the *Eidoleion*, the house of the future self. And reading, he understood that God was the ground of being: "The ground. That's it! God is the ground!" looking out at the trees, and at the fresh rain soaking into God.

PETERIS CEDRINS
TWO POEMS

Ponck Hockie)

dreams describe this circle down her
her calves in blurry light, nowhere
I've been, weathers
the girl streaming under the sheet
ice or approaching Easter
squats in the holocene backwater in bright sun, void, phane
being used at last
to field
houses past the high school wall
shorts, halters & shifts the weather
allows

such time in her, shell out
rare creatures in a vacant lot, pineal shells with sinuous flukes
nuts? I draw an eye, keine Sandkunst mehr, a kind
Jugendstil draws near, a prehistoric one
in dark attire, slender violins slimed with pale silt
play with themselves, afire, spare swing

tire vertical in vair murk
I follow as far as I can with my
sleep

Three TVs ablaze in a single unveiled body at Margaret & Tower
& behind the Tower (guarded by electric eyes)
an ancient orchard kept up by hidden keepers
(night birds & bats) but suffused with chemical stinks
deer & from there across Whaleback, the river, & gloomy Mt.
Marion
to Catskills—purple & Tum
is empty except for Venus & the Crocus of Venus
a light from behind the mountains
the crickets near the houses the orchard is still
silent dogs
sleepers at the Lyceum rearing to close

Three TVs blaze in an empty body at the edge of the village
the villagers hooded, or hidden, or abscondite with the fabulous
wolves
a sense of the river
& the backwater—der Weiher—in the orchard
but rampant halogen leisure, brick-smell
east, toward Pine Plains, two self-operated car washes
& the mysterious laundromat light
blue houses built on bare hillocks
Nevada, ninguit here in the sinister riches?

A pound of copper-rust carefully alcoholised when there is
nothing
between the moon & morning
stirred, mother, sublimate in ashes

Margelle brim of a well, as on the island
the well you thought was door, Daleth
made love there
there is no crime
the rest of the country has been discovered
this is its head, empty of dream
participates reluctantly in the national life

Automobile blue-eyed grass forced crocus at Mohican Mkt.
or old Mr. Feldman leaping back from his stocks of porn
"we have everything" plutonic indigo

& the Shining One

on low veneniferous growths by the orchard,
"life being resident exclusively in the humid radical,"

Rötlich steigt im grünen Weiher der Fisch

for Jeffra
1991. 12. May
reading Trakl

RON PADGETT
PROSE POEM

The morning coffee. I'm not sure why I drink it. Maybe it's the ritual of the cup, the spoon, the hot water, the milk, and the little heap of brown grit, the way they come together to form a nail I can hang the day on. It's something to do between being asleep and being awake. Surely there's something better to do, though, than to drink a cup of instant coffee. Such as meditate? About what? About having a cup of coffee. A cup of coffee whose first drink is too hot and whose last drink is too cool, but whose many in-between drinks are, like Baby Bear's porridge, just right. Papa Bear looks disgruntled. He removes his spectacles and swivels his eyes onto the cup that sits before Baby Bear, and then, after a discrete cough, reaches over and picks it up. Baby Bear doesn't understand this disruption of the morning routine. Papa Bear brings the cup close to his face and peers at it intently. The cup shatters in his paw, explodes actually, sending fragments and brown liquid all over the room. In a way it's good that Mama Bear isn't there. Better that she rest in her grave beyond the garden, unaware of what has happened to the world.

ANDREA ZANZOTTO
from FOSFENI

(Tr. from the Italian by Pasquale Verdicchio)

LIKE LAST SUPPERS

Nocturnal thirst of march,
dry countryside razed cold
like a beard is shaven
shaven every will of levitation
and everything is leavened afterall comprehended in the
cold,
compressor of the cold
the dust is cold, so dry from thirst, in the headlights,
that in the shave we find don't bark
the road the turnoff—sneeze—
upset humpbacks crescent loaded with empty
loaded streets and then grasses from the field and emptied palate
and too much responsible for invention don't bark
but not night, but with a start in the night,
roads which the least little thing hastened to die
so as to be more chaste more deserving an instant
to be a headlight
or a shining of nothing-glass don't bark

Like going in through the back door
in the sweet composition of a last supper
more squared off—fits and starts from outside—of all
that one could breathlessly dream, envy—
like in the must of a sublimation
without rays without reliefs without pretense
in any case everything loftly content in its sub-being
rather a type of N.N.N. under gel under alcohol gel
Supper in the cold defence only from yourself

supper where it's always opportune to insinuate the foot
where meats viande victuals and milk and cappuccino
where golden drug of supper sinks
effuses in an emersion of itself of faces of con-figurations
catering to no-one and itself, tippable composition,
accessible initiation miniorgasm in etcí
little hot then of initiation in in zzz of sleep razor
warm hole (insinuations) (indications)
sacred coagulation (gossip)
of initiation, of pauperty, of resignation to little puppets
of beautiful-to-the-minimum
turgidity of little value, stare contained in the laces
of victuals and trays of table fruit, not even dining table
There are no dining tables here razor
but only blood-foods and irritable gelatins
and restaurant-girl who scuttles away
and circic circuits, toys high in anxiety
If I were to give theory of a face if I would
give myself up to dissimetry (this me)
of a convolvulus of face in one's own blondness, dry rain,
of a nestling of beauty-in-the-nice-gel razor
golden threads inside a lamp, under a violent memory:
scarce words and scarce lines, all friendly,
travelling, head on the pillow,
sleep, settled the rest on everything,
melding into all sleeping,
startled along divinely ruined streets

I haven't seen much for a while around
of the delicate, of the after-face,
a while since I had unwrapped a frace from the face,
a while since I had subtracted, since I dropped my hand
a while since I had last been startled in the car
equilibrium of groves and countryside, pool table false
clinking betrayal and true oh of tops for last suppers
"Which conditioner do you prefer for your hair?"
little hair-dresser top for last
supper on the edge of the fields, restaurant
"Which nail polish?"

girl, restaurant (under dust)
(askance) (agold) (ahair and then who knows what)
"Which detergent which absorbent for the underthings,
those outside
under the stars or those?"
and how many sweet formalities

ΘΕΩΡΙΑ ΚΡΥΟΣ

*

Impossible loves like
the hills are actually impossible
It is not possible that so much love
in them is so openly
given
and at the same time dissimulated, rather
made inaccessible

Series without rest of inaccessability
that nevertheless makes it captivating
ingrading carpet on the
largest breccia insanity uselessness
Hills rich of a thousand deadly dangers
for quietly
for reckless aid
among skying
for insufficient attention to itself—
from chance to chance
"it will hinder" "it will defile itself'

DISTRUST THROAT, BODY, MOVEMENTS, THEATRE

I

1 I'd like to leave, me
I'd like to leave, you
that is not aimless wandering nor living in the line
it's too much for certain-these-chords-vocal
and in any case I am left out of it
I'd like to suppress
I'd like to rescind
I'd like to intuit myself in swarms in flocks in crowds
and begin and carry out Blue gold Pluriblue

2 Blue doubt blue certainty that does not pierce at all
Ultracold, suggestions of cold
l l f leaf ea a
And dripping in warmth and colour
of multiblue-gold candle
But dusts of pink-wind like extinguished larynx
Every exaltation prohibited equilibrated devolved
in cold-storage and gives blue-gold
In the dilemma of the tree TREESTRIPS
In the voice (between us) that concerns TRAPS for birds
for causal skies and running of waters
and courses and followings and undone
zippers

3 I'd like to desist I'd like to win again
I'd like two hundred I'd like a thousand, glowing, suddenly
Store approach them and then store them
and then instead you find gloss-word password
between felt and felt and wood stingy wren

4 Oh shake off flay gold from the fitters
don't you see that paths-moon spin toward every part
Useless behind. . . (gag, bit)

5 Intuition and desperation such close twins
so subtly innoculated
resurfaced in bacterial gold, of toothpick
Who knew? Who said it?
To know now—of poaching—abstracting from
fronds of concensus, from gnawing the line

II

1 Ch. M., J.M.L. and others
Distrust the body cause every action to faint from hunger
Although those bodies, the too terrestrial, the too astral,
would crowd together oh, finally understood, like
TREES with asterisk (repeated above and below the line
in isolation and in the plot
from millions of eons X millions of mountain eons). . .
They (the trees) are certainly cautious in announcing
themselves and
tritritri trii
and much slower of how I heard them triii triii
oh irradicolarity iniity
All this—even—too will transcend me
even if, at times, I felt like sated with it or clumsy triii
In qualifying myself I placed myself in the middle
documents in hand
I did not subdivide myself up to the door-abyss
of the self-service
I wanted even more and more maximums and minimums
and high conduct
and high frequency offensive-defensive
I wanted to install and camouflage myself forever,
calculated forever,
drunk in the middle of the immense exterminability
and participate in the poiuring and shaking downward
of libels of science and glory
of virginal vegetable cruelty
There has never been any dance except that of agony
No chords or vocal membranes

nor impulse of press-body-sebum
nor undoing of body in scales and dashes
Oh at least trees in agony. . . Against. . .

In autumn drowning in its gold swim
he pulls the cart overloaded with sacks of wood shavings
he carries on his shoulders
the little mendicant's sack with the reflector
among maniacally pure dusts
dusts and trees trees Oh
miserable and blessed
you who are external to any desire to guide
raise brandish the poker

Jero-phano-gram no more no less
left between the twigs of the broom
They are not tree ideologies nor do they have
status of dynamic directions
for any hypothesis of musicality
nor of reductions to the intimate
for every and whatever dispersed finintimity
But the little sack rings with the reflector and
I am here in my soup
in my burning little plate
with blot ants flies from manure
before autumn: let's go in!
Oh only my tree trii millimeterate
for the little countess that she bleed
yes
yes, you grabbed her by the peduncle
by the caudal raddle
For the little countess of the cogito/sleep, rhyzomes of sleep
Nor is there time. . .and how much I've had, how much!
But who knows. . .yawns. . .there is time, wonderful time

and strengths and good and mother of truths
At the selfservice gas station
where and trees trees arrive still
FIRES
We have not just untongued away till now

Drop Drip with face in the plate.

NETS

Low shots skies lights
goal score aaah
and shells itself up sibils needle snali
blind stumps sweats cold

in the silence that inverts the course that

to the empty belly to the skeleton to the straw
to the porous of the gold-want
to the compact of the sky-lived
low blows
such that the context develop
and repeat in every challenge
sign itself of viscera/crimes
low blows ssst! and synthesis
or wonder so dense as to no longer explode
or usualness
but overnighting distract incalculable

Disembody one's self of schema and scenes

Low blows outlet of blood ⫷ that ⫷

seemed-bruised-by-larvae
—Stiffens itself with tight belly
it lowers itself tightly to the sheet
grassy dusty eroded by the nights
and by the days divinant magical trade winds
The falling has slowed
the event well filamented
has placed itself level, at the foot,
for a low blow

skillfully ⫷ teeth ⫷ collected

Low blows now stellar lessons
Stellarity of things
outstretched in nonsense in old
foolish ambitions purity —> document

⫷ and sweats cold-well ⫷

Low blows in the veil
in the veto

(ANTICYCLONES, WINTERS)

I

See everything that—violet and gold and soft—
I would say almost regurgitates regurgitates
does not hold back is happy is mature
in giving figures ripping up figures other figures
in violet and golds To sprout golds consider, place hand,

look outside, take note, to heart, take on,
be some violence so as to take to heart

Be in the next on one-to-one with the remote of
the violet
yes, violence in this throat
I listen swimming to all this violence
so primary and uncreated as to be innocent
but no less assassin—in the gold and in the violet
There's the shout or the touch or the collapse
violet of no no no the bells of the predicator
Violet is my understanding interreading
burdens makes mass goes in mass gold and violet
all for you this transparent
mania of destructuralization but lift up there on the table
the survival

and the blood stain Gewalt
raised me like violet filth
it twisted me within itself, it had lost me in itself, filth.

II

And you in the intimate of my gold wait for me
and I in the intimate of your gold gaze
it is too soft, ambrosiacally poured like ether
to be gold it is too far to be ours
yet nothing is more nest than this infinite
perfused in gold, hoed away along the ozone field
(anticyclones, winters)
substance in which eternity would circulate
would enjoy would make
all in one with the scarecrow
alone but but qualified inhabitant of the hill
in all golds the sky blues,
the encysted abstinences violet
the unparalleled incontinence violet
the erratic truths the crunching and the climbing

Careful of who holds the tomahawk
to who fords ahead
and—without equal—to disturbances
fallen from the lunar soils
from throat to throat.

III

It is certain, I gather in the beauty of the bewilderment
with the most granulated supplication
what there is of the silence—and it is so much
Where there form the surroundings and it acclimates
to other subtle rights and duties

Or in the dispersed of the gravel bank hoarding
that glassydark it becomes
what there is of water—and it is such

Orientated by insane boldness and deficiencies
and dark idioms
precipitated within the idiom
in order to multiply its thorns the icicles

It would seem that rarity whistles through the mistletoes of the
wind and
lash, all those bent withes in the gravel bank,
but very mysteriously rebels

Wherever and whatever thing in agedness is alleviated
in front of what will never but never be old,
is less thin than what is believed all around;
sterile,it does not lose vivacity
fecund, in illustrations it dissolves

And the moon lights phryne and rime
in the falling of the yes
in passing unexpected
with opposition as if taking courage

from where more empty is the mountain
gains in fortune
immobile trail on the slope
[more good hope]

Vocability, photons

Dispersed within a vocability sweetest
Eurosia, genius of the
hailstones, dispersed therein Barbara
photoreceptor of the radicularities of lightning

Lucia now emerges from the earthquaked
crystal of the hill's
diaphaneities Diva and niña of the Cold
perhaps with a certain following of dour priestlings
who invite me to dinner, to the mess hall, to warm ration
She holds a splinter of rays
that pierce any ubiquity whatsoever
in her other hand the 9 degrees below zero
of light gauze-snow,
feather of bird-once-snow,
She cannot protect cannot guide
but will never be of second order
The scalding that has skinned

so much of her face and burned away her eyes
—and the why and how are no longer known—
She was darkness and comes from darkness of her own
excess
trimmed with lace of rays

in the name of the future ΛΟΓΟΣ and of all the cold to
come
but well aligned, catalogued in snows
but everyone pupil and rich tear of attention
but rutting for numbers and traces
oh how the dialogue thickens with breaths and piss
hints glimpses!

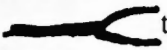
Lucia: you are neither mother, nor gifts-in-shadows or in crystal,
but you are the one who dawns upon what remained
at your shoulders scarce ravine of a year,
a fainting down down from hill to hill
a fainting up up to the heavens
Within the ever hungry snare of the cold
right before you
we struggle
and we yearn for rations
and to spout forth to sweat out remove by hoeing,
yes, to let go of everything, the empty hutches, wide
open
It's gone, no regrets,
dryness only here and there or scraps,
flesh-coloured in the rough of palates—
exactly in the eye the point-blank n
(a need of numbers, of accounting, of
double rations)

(Now she's coming up behind you Lucy
bigger and thinner than her own immense kindness)

Allow, diva Lucia, at your feet—where I know
they lay, me who is blind to all
gradations of light—
that disbands through ravines—where you well know—
humble desire for panegyric.

A return of tears to the eyes. Blow up of
a single photon. Ω

SIMPLE FUTURE—OR ANTERIOR?

Logos, in every crystal of glorious snow brine
even if maybe you are nothing more than an hypothesis

than a Witz an impulse of subtle anger
Unverifiable connection between frosts and frosts
points of sight and points of sight

Not repent not to say too much not to gather up
too much be stalk and branch
sparked by immobility into drops
to invent to hollow out to entrap

The dawning and varied nudity of being
I will soon mimic, and the meanest of touches, the
vigorous note,
me negated in the cold
contamination and clarity ciliated slightly in this direction

Logos —not important mutisms nor rumours
—not false notes nor dwarf-colours crowded
stumbles
—not your other possible importance
nor your death
nor your loss
that I took on in profusion
Perfusion of cold and little dazzling fevers
and infinite immicrobation
perfusion from vein to vein—from poverty to poverty

Every step displaces and impliers like the turn of a
screw
every voice suffocates sweetly useless
every gaze de-eyes itself

but so as to gain the most of the compensation and the
most terrible starrity, like
of snow on the edge of the of the
indicated
movement
But humiliated.

Andrea Zanzotto (1921) has stated that in his first books he "actually cancelled human presence, out of a form of distaste caused by historical events. [He] wanted only to speak of landscape, to return to a nature in which man had not been active. It was a psychological reflex-re-action to the devastation of war." This is certainly true of the first book to introduce this singular poet to an Italian scene at that time strongly under the influence of Neorealism, the 1951 *Dietro il paesaggio (Behind the Landscape).*

If it is at all possible to generalize Zanzotto's poetics as a whole, it could be said to be a poetry centered around the rapport of the various linguistic possibilities open to a human biological/existential presence. Of course, such work is directly tied to the historical presence of poetic language and form. Zanzotto's reconsiderations of traditional language and forms, in works such as *Elegy and Other Verses*, 1954; *IX Eclogues*, 1962; *Galateo*, 1978, in which the presence of Tasso, Petrarca, Della Casa, and others, looms large, seeks to extend and test their limits.

In the opinion of some, the publication of *La Beltà* in 1968, with its attempts at undoing institutionalized forms of communication, brought Zanzotto close to the poetic innovations of the avant-garde group *I Novissimi* (1961), whose members included Antonio Porta, Edoardo Sanguineti, and Alfredo Giuliani. And, indeed, he did share with *I Novissimi* an adamant dislike for the neocapitalist and consumeristic culture whose influence had touched post-war Italy, as well as a need to reassess the function of the subject as represented by the writing "I." But Zanzotto's activity differentiates itself from that of *I Novissimi* in two significant ways: first of all, the actions of *I Novissimi* on language are regarded to have been mostly terroristic and destructive in nature and, more importantly, their target was Italian as a standardized (and therefore fictional) language. Zanzotto's *modus operandi*, on the other hand, has been to trace his way back to, and disrupt, accepted linguistic expression through alternative languages like baby-talk and the dialect of the Veneto region in which he lives. Secondly, Zanzotto's interest in the "I" is engaged in rescuing it from its designation as pronoun and establishing it in the landscape as a noun, as opposed to *I Novissimi*'s attempts at erasing its presence altogether.

Fosfeni (1983), from which the poems translated herein are taken, is, in its exploration of the movement from topos to logos, their blending of position and interplay, one of Zanzotto's most complex collections. The flow diagram auto ⇌ bio ⇌ graphy, offered by Zanzotto in a piece written just before the release of *Fosfeni*, expresses the movement of language in the poetic process, where the biological body is the point of intersection. "Last Suppers," which opens the collection, presents a repeating finality that points to a continuous renewal of discursive tendencies. The Platonic or Biblical banquet multiplied *ad infinitum* offers an open ended poetic dialogue and the provisions which fuel that exercise.

As illustrated, the process leads Zanzotto to refer to poetry as a "revomiting," which may remind us of Charles Olson's remark that "diet precedes language." The ingestion of language returns, after a close association with the body, poetry as a varied assortment of graphemes, phrases, letters, and verses. This product, a gelatinous substance present in the pages of *Fosfeni* as gel, gelatin, and the like, aids in the association (gelling) of topos and logos. As it leaves the body, it rejoins and alters the landscape as an atmospherical kin to gel (snow, ice, or frost), coating the ground with an accumulation of a consistent and coherent poetics upon which the poet treads.

—PV

1

The idea of illusion suggests that existences in different worlds, herself at different stages, or moving from one metaphor to another, can compare. She is trying to tell you the moon's color in eclipse, because she cannot reproduce a light in her memory with a pigment that is made, like a word, though seeing the moon enables a person to make inaccurate color. Think, if experience in her is time, because she gets to a state of being by experience, first. The experience is an interval in the body, but it also accompanies remembering.

2

Sun from behind you on asters, chamisa. You turn. You find a space as wide, as if time falls outside a stimulus, and her memory of the glow becomes space in her. Her body and will coordinate, like the relation of experience to seeing and experience to feeling the moon, which has no size. Actual size of its color in her body assesses vicissitudes of an aspiration created by seeing, so in this case, actual size became a piece of size in her.

3

You look on the plain from a bluff with him, and a point of juniper grows dark and dense,
of scattered ones, a piece of sieved material on your side of a membrane of noon light.
Seeing the object locates it like a cause in your body, for noticing a faint green around it
is an underground stream. Seeing what had been invisible is a response to the object.
His presence, a cause or weight in nature, does not enter experience, but accompanies it,
as experience had accompanied her memory of her, her features in her relative's face.

4

If she only sees with another person, what about the response is phenomenal, and what is
contingent, as a comet or virus, resonating to its presence in an other human being,
but which could be a metaphor, like grass in light, or sunlight on distant yellow trees?
Nature, full of causes that never enter experience, contrasts to your thinking adjusting contingency
to contingency like a synthesis. Desire to know opposes, for example, desire for children.
It structures a branched straw in the snow, so its blue shadow is blue in a tiny armpit. When
he sees autumn grass, I tell him about this shadow on snow, leapfrog of see/know, to straw of light.

5

A sliver of cloud lights up. Not knowing where it is between you and the horizon
turns into desire to know this. "Where" is the secret of durable pigment. "It" is the part
hit by an angle of light that is moving, so each moment triangulates space by way of the cloud.
On huge new insects after rain, light leapfrogs like falling. A vertigo analyzes a cloud, not
giving you to know it, the way knowing opposes wanting a person, or a person is opposed to an infant,
being inspired, not experiencing.

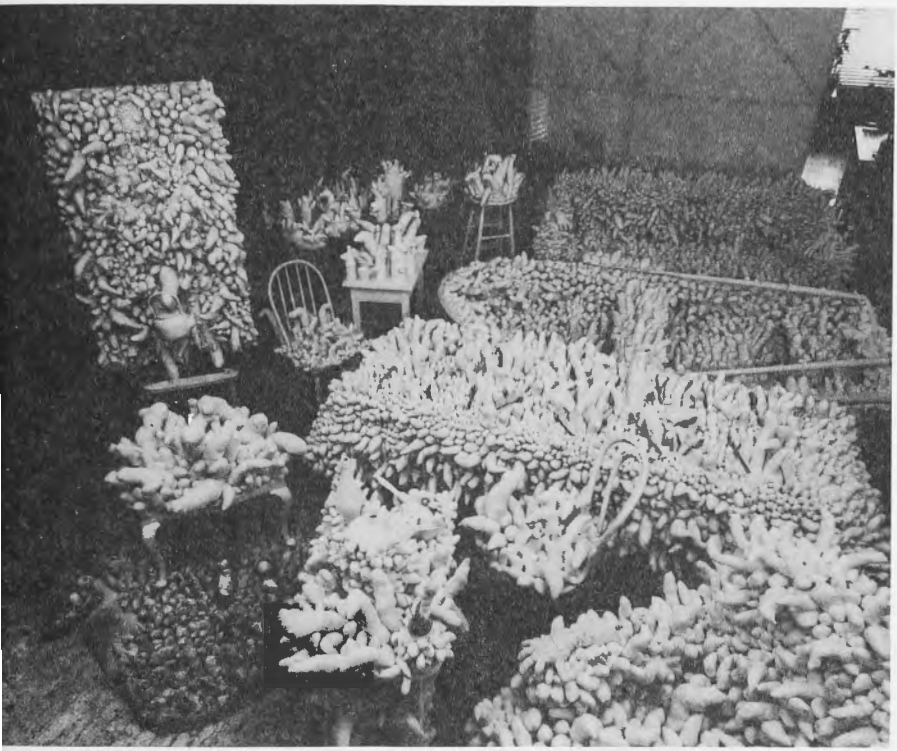
6

She is making the space during the day in an unanalyzed form, expressing it, using light,
which as experience emotes a color, and one of the elements of making is the space,
because she cannot see the light as a tool, while she is still figuring how to use it. Its use
is his presence, or its end is, to which its use is a means. Her concentration obliterates time,
like the relation of experience to this moment. The interval that becomes her body, she calls emergence,
asymptote to her person. It analyzes light as an imaginary, instead of a thought focus,
and falls outside the stimulus of an absent person as a golden light in the room.

7

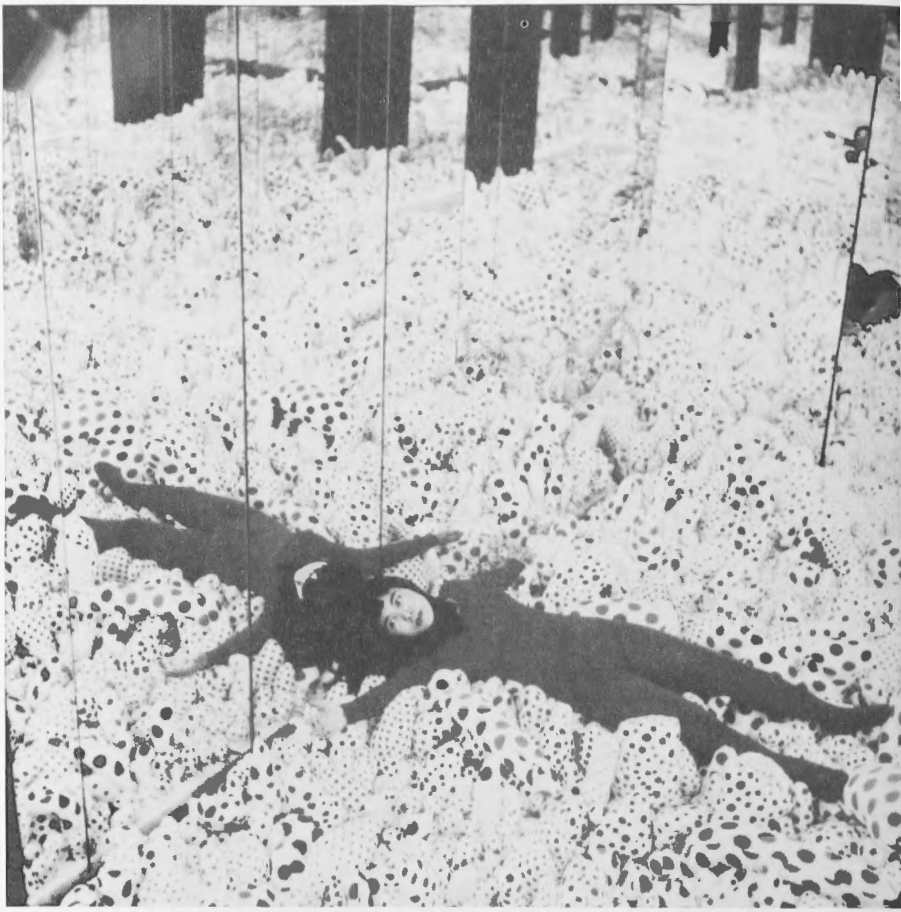
Seeing the light became a substance in her body, as knowing a ghost by seeing light in a room,
a relation of experience to feeling. The metaphor of the light became an obliterating emotion,
from one metaphor to another, so she got to the state of being of the light by knowing, first,
a synthesis that put time outside her situation. She makes that into time, which can flood a plain,
inside a leaf, a leaf of gilt on an image. Wanting to know as opposed to wanting a person
is herself in a room flooded by light through yellow leaves. Each leaf like an ancestral feature
assesses the vicissitudes of this aspiration. A consciousness outside of a state of being is flooded.

YAYOI KUSAMA
SIX WORKS



KUSAMA'S STUDIO

New York City, ca. 1962–64
(Photo: The Artist and The Center for International Contemporary Arts)



KUSAMA IN THE
INFINITY MIRROR ROOM—PHALLUS FIELD
(OR FLOOR SHOW)

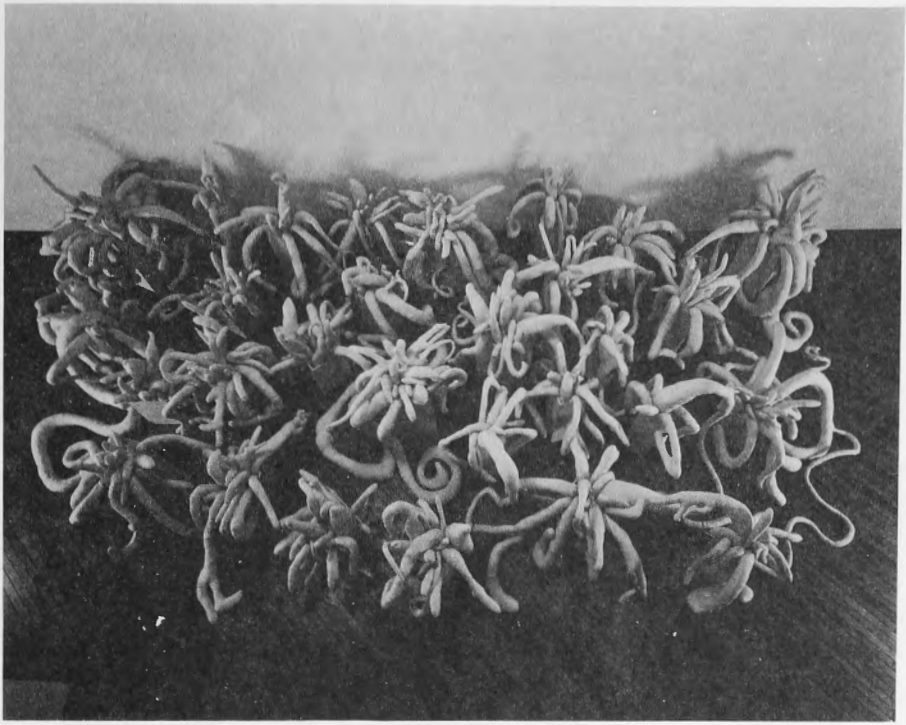
At The Castellane Gallery,
New York City, 1965
(Photo: The Artist and The Center for
International Contemporary Arts)

Left: MOON NIGHT / Right: FLOWER

Left: Mixed Media, 1985, 213 x 157 x 90 cm / Right: Mixed Media, 1986, 107 x 70 x 70 cm (Photo: Fuji Television Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)

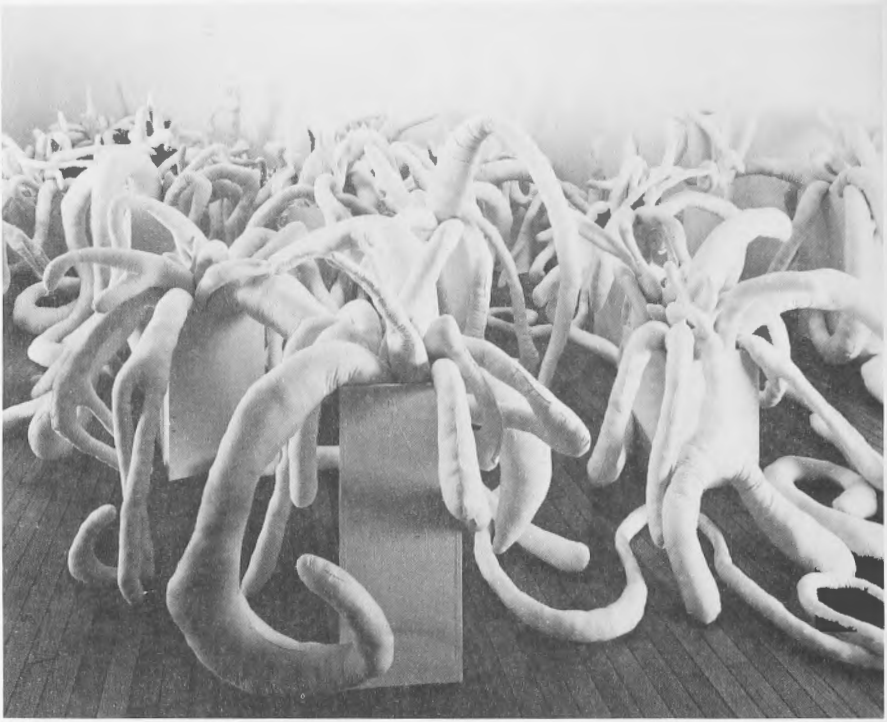
Left: NIGHT 2 / Center: NIGHT 1
Right: BLACK FLOWER

Left: Mixed Media, 1985, 132 x 93 x 93 cm / Center: Mixed Media, 1985, 78 x 63 x 63 cm / Right: Mixed Media, 1986, 225 x 145 x 63 cm (Photo: Fuji Television Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)



HEAVEN & EARTH

Mixed Media, 1991, 130 x 500 x 300 cm
(Photo: Fuji Television
Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)



HEAVEN & EARTH (DETAIL)

(Photo: Fuji Television Gallery Co., Ltd., Tokyo)

PAMELA WYE

YAYOI KUSAMA: Orgiastic Flower Beds & Other Soft Hardware

Invasions that get out of hand. Rabid proliferations that overwhelm, bit by bit, the surroundings and then the self. Too late to close Pandora's box. In the past 30 years, Yayoi Kusama has let out of the box of Japanese feminine propriety a raging libidinous expression that appears forever at the brink of Pandemonium. The ancients knew what they were doing when they included libidinous passion among the Spites that escaped from Pandora's box. Uncontrolled passion is disturbing to ordered society. But in the hands of a master brinkwoman, this Spite becomes a Muse, and Pandemonium a place of glorious revenge.

In 1957, a fiercely ambitious twenty-eight-year-old Kusama moved from Japan to New York, but not before sending off two letters and some watercolors to Georgia O'Keeffe "to ask you would kindly show me the way to approach this life." She exhibited regularly in New York and Europe in the burgeoning '60s' context of minimalist painting, post-minimalist sculpture and, finally, happenings. She returned to Japan in 1972 where she continues her prolific production. Though she works out of a studio in a psychiatric hospital, one could hardly place her in the outsider tradition of Adolf Wölfli or Martin Ramirez—both institutionalized chronic schizophrenics. Though the exact nature of Kusama's psychological make-up is ambiguous, it is stunningly central to both the form and content of her art.

Kusama imbues the overwhelming multiplication that was the core of the '60s' "all-over" aesthetic with a ferocious visceral power that startles when considered alongside the more prevalent impersonal repetitions of, say, Carl Andre. The ego-dissolution that is implied by these all-over works is effectuated by very different means—overwhelming floridity by Kusama, numbing sterility by Andre. Kusama contributed early and profoundly to the '60s' aesthetic during her stay in NYC. Artists like Donald Judd and Frank Stella collected her all-over *Infinity Net* paintings during the formative years of their own art, while her later sewn-and-stuffed canvas sculpture prefigured the emergence of body reference and sexuality in the post-minimalist sculpture of Eva Hesse. However, her impact was more in the nature of a guerilla attack—she hit hard, early and on-target but she

disappeared before time could solidify a place for her, which, even under the best of circumstances, would be tentative by virtue of her exotic eccentricity—female, Japanese, and flirting with mental illness.

Kusama's work reminds us that the all-over repetitiousness of minimalism is both a courting and an appropriation of the methods of madness. Even mainstream movies know this—the most horrific moment in *The Shining* is Shelley Duvall's discovery that the fruits of her writer-husband's (Jack Nicholson) frenzy of writing are reams of paper covered with the same typewritten sentence, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

> The repetitive vision and accumulation which are the main themes of my art. . .originate from the experience of illusion in the monotonous and repetitive action which I have always had since I was very young.[1]

In the minute, painstakingly repetitive accumulations that Kusama builds into large field paintings and phalli-covered objects, the viewer gets an idea of how literally mind-boggling an experience it must be to actually make this art. Friends report that Kusama would work without interruption until she'd collapse from exhaustion. From the up-close vantage point of the artist, the field must indeed appear endless and overwhelming. The trance-like, altered states of consciousness provoked by the mechanically repeated yet subtly variable mark-making gesture simulate, in their threat to the integrity of the self, the terrifying (and seductive) vertigoes of mental illness.

Is such an art-making process a deliberate courting of madness or an accommodation of it? Is it an invasion of one part of the self by another part, or a surrender? Or perhaps a rebellion, or is it an escape? These works and working methods are strange surrogate suicides yet they become, by virtue of their symbolic nature, testimony to a life-affirming activity.

> I have managed to grope and find a way to live by tracing a thread that is art. However, if it hadn't been for art, I would have killed myself a long time ago, from an inability to withstand the environment. . . . A white curtain starts to fall around me and cut me off from the outer world. How long did I use to stay in nihility? On occasions I ceased to see the purpose of what I was looking at, or did not comprehend what people were talking about.[2]

Kusama had childhood hallucinations of "proliferating patterns of dots, nets or flowers which spread over her surroundings and threatened to dissolve her own self." Experimenting in the early '60s with non-art

materials, she gave form to those hallucinations in a strange taxidermy of sewn-and-stuffed canvas phalli, nodules and breasts. Indeed, the installation piece *Infinity Mirror Room—Phalli's Field (or Floor Show)* (1965) literally situates a prone Kusama, as though overcome, in the middle of an endlessly replicated (via mirrors) field of polka-dotted protuberances. Her *Compulsion Furniture*, on the other hand (pictured en masse in the photo of her studio circa 1962-4), gives form to a demonic vision of our everyday surroundings. Under Kusama's tutelage, the humble objects of our daily lives—chair, couch, ladder, stool, dressing table, rowboat, dishes, shoes and clothing—erupt in libidinal revolt, unleashing a pandemic contagion of phalli and breasts. Prickly-looking like barnacles, the encrusted surfaces of these once-loyal objects have turned hostile to our needs. But then, this tumescent expression of the randy chair or shoe's desire is the result of how many countless hours (centuries) of people casually snuggling their asses, feet or other body parts into said chairs, shoes, couches...? These rebellious objects move us to say, as we usually do when those on whom we depend insist on their own pleasures, "But, but, how could you do this to me?"

In comparison to her *Compulsion Furniture*, Kusama's recent (1985-6) free-standing *Flowers*, with the bearing and presence of self-contained figures, appear downright classical. Their outer classicism, however, holds in check a tortured inner life. Their poignant dignity and poised acceptance of their own bizarre natures is tinged with the tension of a relentless effort at self-containment. Representing a pause in Kusama's obsessive all-overness, these femme/flowers are built up of stuffed polka-dotted phalli that huddle and weave together to form a clearly delimited shape that's in contrast to the hysterical transgression of boundaries that makes up her *Infinity Net* paintings and *Compulsion Furniture*. The figurative wholeness of these flowers does not allow itself to be disfigured and banished by a megalomaniacal ground. Though the price of such effort has gnarled them, their blank fluffy faces, like beds of cotton-candied pubic hair show these twisted sisters to possess a sweet sexuality and innocent hearts.

Kusama's tallest *Flowers* are doubled-headed. Facing Janus-like in opposite directions, they encompass the past and the future with the full sun-flower faces of their prime, while the heads of the little-sister flowers are pointed upward in growth, and the small independent bud-forms have yet to open. Though Kusama's *Compulsion Furniture* has always implied a familial domesticity (albeit an outrageous one), these free-standing sculptures are the first constructions that read as a family.

Color (regretfully absent from the present black and white photos) is an essential part of Kusama's flowers. As are the polka dots with which she works up evocative high-gloss surfaces that range in feel from a goofy "girls just want to have fun!" insouciance to a nocturnal cosmic, Milky Way solemnity.

> The polka dot has the form of the sun, signifying masculine energy. . . . The polka dot has the form of the moon, symbolizing the feminine principle of reproduction and growth. Polka dots suggest multiplication to infinity. Our earth is only one polka dot among millions of others. . .We must forget ourselves with polka dots! We must lose ourselves in the ever-advancing stream of eternity.[3]

Inspired by the reception of her 1989 New York retrospective at the Center for International Contemporary Arts after a 17-year "disappearance" from the United States, Kusama has come up with new sculpture (on exhibit at the Fuji Television Gallery in Tokyo this past summer) that dazzles with its energetic metamorphosis of some career-long preoccupations.

The serpentine legs and elephantine phalluses, cords and creepers flowing out of the small army of Pandora's boxes in *Heaven and Earth* strain toward the viewer with the urgency of the long-repressed. Or are they diving back into boxes for which they've grown too big, attempting a return to a simpler, more tidy non-existence? With their no-nonsense box-like pots, they are nearly suitable for the reception area of some unsuspecting corporation which, in any case, could probably use the injection of primal kick supplied by the soft dildoes, dangling prostheses, phallus-less crotches and impenetrable Raggedy-Anne-sex-doll shapes that sprout forth. In fact, it is perhaps the slickly efficient repression so essential to the corporate culture that calls forth such a ferocious libidinous reaction.

Though evocative of luxuriant tropical vegetation (with all its hot-house sexuality), *Heaven and Earth* stops short of the paradisiacal and veers toward the disquieting, the haunting. In *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, Jane Ellen Harrison writes of the idea "familiar to every Greek, that the *pithos* [jar] was [also] a grave-jar, that from such grave-jars souls escaped and to them necessarily returned. . . . The grave-jar is but the earlier form of sepulture. . .the. . .phantoms that escape from Pandora's jar are indeed ghosts, but ghosts regarded rather as noisome sprites than as spirits. . ."[4] In addition, Kusama's use of slithering snake-like forms has ancient roots that conflate with the Pandora's box/grave/jar imagery. "Snakes lurk about tombs. . .and the Greeks are not the only people who have seen in a snake the vehicle of a ghost."[5] Then again, this sculptural work could be a wayfaring pack of snakey Medusa heads, with all the petrifying power of that phallic woman's hissing locks.

In addition to her art, Kusama has written and published ten novels since 1977. To date, none of her novels have been translated, but titles hint at her preoccupations: *Manhattan Suicide Addict, Aching Chandelier, The Burning of St. Mark's Church, Double Suicide at Sakuragazuka*, and *Woodstock Phallus Cutter* (which "deals primarily with her obsessed years

in New York and explores the lower depths of its deviant world.") In 1983, she won one of Japan's most progressive literary awards.

At 62 years old, Yayoi Kusama shows no sign of slowing down. One can only hope that her art finds its way, once again, to the United States in order that more of us may become better acquainted with her bracing, excessive yet poignantly human vision.

6/29/91

Notes

[1]Yayoi Kusama, "Why Do I Create Art?", in *Yayoi Kusama: Driving Image* (Tokyo: Parco Publishers, 1986) p. 51.

[2]Kusama, p. 51.

[3]Kusama, p. 20.

[4]Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena To The Study of Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) (originally published Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 43-44.

[5]Harrison, p. 327.

JAMES CLIFFORD
INCIDENTS OF TOURISM IN CHIAPAS & YUCATAN

Notes in memory of Michel Leiris, 1901–1990

Arrival.

Leaving Mexico City, our plane flies close to volcanoes. Then, under a low sky in the streets of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Scattered smiles. What there is to see.

[falling on; as, an *incident* ray]

Dusk, wandering around. Impressions of San Cristóbal. Streets full of accelerating cars close to narrow sidewalks. Anxiety. Constantly watching out for a tired, three-year-old. Ben's disoriented, dragged through a noisy labyrinth. Wants to run. But where?

City coming to life. People moving in all directions.

Clatter of bells from a church somewhere in the dark. People's indifference to us, a relief. Only the other tourists, looking away, seem displeased by our presence, as we are by theirs.

Glances into bright doorways, color coded rooms. Each a side altar, small collection, museum, Cornell box, universe, store.

Beyond the tourist experience: Explorer? Writer? Pilgrim? Scientist? Aesthete? Ecologist? Initiate? Poet? Politico? All the established routes/roots.

Available.

*

Collection.

Tourist "herds" in buses. Safe in their literal bubble.
Taking pictures, buying postcards.
We think we can speak (English) freely without being understood.
Safety of food consumed, streets walked on, sheets slept in.
The somehow inspiring colors of walls and houses.
Pleasures of ignorance. The nameless plants. Displeased by Muzak.
Invisible birds crying in the palms at the Zócalo.
Rolling drums and a cacophonous school band.

*

Incident.

Since Ben is in no shape for a restaurant, we decide to have dinner served in our hotel room. It's old fashioned and chilly, but with a fireplace that we were told could be used. Dinner beside a roaring blaze! However Judith's a little embarrassed to ask someone to lay the fire since today the weather in San Cristóbal turned warm. I prevail. We're tourists. So what if we want a fire on a warm night? The cozy atmosphere will be nice.

Two telephone calls. Finally a man appears with a half dozen sticks and a gas can. Glum, none of the usual banter. He douses the wood, throws on a match, watches a minute and leaves. The fire flares, fades. (We've paid 3,000 pesos—$1.25.) I look everywhere for paper to revive the flames, but none is to be found (the hotel staff are endlessly tidying up). Should we complain? (But for $1.25?) And we probably shouldn't have asked anyway. Still, the room *is* chilly. (A fire wouldn't have helped much.) And how could he bring just six sticks? (Is wood so hard to come by here?) Our cozy fire's only contribution to the room's atmosphere is a strong odor of gas.

Outside, crowds of people stroll in the warm evening. We're famished. More delays. Dinner comes at last, and it's delicious. The wine tastes good. We go to sleep.

*

Through a Doorway.

Photographs strictly forbidden, by order of the Indian municipal government.

"The San Loranzo [Zinacantán] church is remarkable mainly for its saints, many of whom wear Zinacanteco robes. It also has a wooden cross, twenty feet tall, swathed in blue cloth and decked with streamers like the ones on the Indians' hats. When we come out, copal smoke is billowing from the chapel door and the men who were drinking have gone inside. Three musicians on a bench to the right of the altar are playing a harp, a violin, and a guitar. The instruments, like the alcohol, are homemade; they produce a reedy, off-key dirge of fathomless sadness. Three other men in full regalia dance slowly, swaying to the maudlin songs. Hats and bottles are on the table, and behind those you see a dark Christ wreathed in arum lilies, chrysanthemums, and clouds of incense."

—Ronald Wright, *Time Among the Maya: Travels in Belize, Guatemala, and Mexico*, 1989

When we visit the church of San Lorenzo, a basketball tournament is in progress outside. Bright uniforms and a squawking loudspeaker.

*

Apprentice traveller.

For Ben, every day is a series of arbitrary moves. He's jerked from place to place, a lot of different faces, things, sounds. He works to invent routes and routines. Visits to a favorite place atop the Zócalo bandstand, retreats to the hotel room and a small collection of toys.

Ben shouts across the street to a grim looking soldier (helmet, automatic rifle) who's guarding a bank. White gloved fingers on the gun barrel ripple. A grin spreads beneath the reflecting sunglasses.

Collecting pats on the head.

A local boy plays with cheap plastic cars, a cowboy, an Indian. Ben contributes his matchbox rocketmobile. Things are set up, knocked down. A trade negotiated.

*

Incident.

Ben and I explore the hotel's long halls. On the third floor, a passage leads up to the roof. Suddenly the whole city of San Cristóbal is visible. A full 360° ringed by mountains. Immense, variegated dome of sky—an area of intense blue here, rain laden clouds there. Light filtering in at the edges.

Exhilarating. We count all the churches.

Later, I remember what Mary Pratt, writing on the history of travel literature, calls the "monarch of all I survey scene." From a hilltop, promontory, balcony. . .the "whole" is grasped, usually as a natural (unpopulated) landscape. On our hotel roof, everything that made us feel strangers down in the streets (language, looks, gestures, fear of being cheated, of falling ill, of seeming stupid) is gone. Replaced by an expanded range of sight, a feeling of centrality.

Isn't some moment of power, of emptying/opening, part of any "good trip?"

*

We fly to Yucatan.

*

Incident.

Obligatory contretemps with *taxista* at Cancún Airport. We bargain him down to the going rate. Hey, no hard feelings. In the course of a pleasant conversation it emerges that our driver is a school teacher. Salary hasn't gone up in ten years. *No importa.* Our job is to make you feel welcome. His wife sells Fuller Brush products. He drives a dilapidated cab. The governments of Latin America are all corrupt, he says, with plenty of help from the USA. What counts is to be honest, to sleep well at night. My wife always has to wake me; I sleep too well.

Forty minutes down the coast to our resort, La Posada del Capitán Lafitte. (Its billboard features a pirate with eye patch.) At the end of a long bumpy driveway, stucco cabins and a perfect white beach.

*

Resort.

Idyllic community. No money openly changes hands. "Sign, Sign, Sign. Pay, Pay, Pay!" laughs the young man taking us to our *cabaña.* The poolside bar seems to be always open. Empty pockets. Bare feet. We relax. Every morning a couple of guys sweep the sand, clearing the debris thrown up by the waves.

Perfect white beach.

First night: a "floor show." The emcee, a waiter with pretty good English, asks us to be patient, to wait just "five Mexican minutes!" The manager's wife who operates the gift shop and a couple of waiters dance in costume, *típico*, beer bottles balanced on heads. (They seem to be having fun.) Music is provided by a trio of guitarists. Then a *piñada* for the kids, candy flying, balloons popping. Ben wild with excitement. Finally, an elimination broom dance. Young and old. Family ambiance. We drop our skepticism (It's a tourist trap, phoney, too windy, drinks expensive. . .) and begin to feel at home.

By breakfast the next day everybody seems to know "Ben."

Unlike the international tourist scene at San Cristóbal, every guest at the Posada Capitán Lafitte speaks North American English. We have all booked our *cabañas* through the same 800 number in Colorado. No averted looks. We are here to have fun with people just like us.

*

Virtuous tourists.

Adjoining the Posada Lafitte, another ideal community—"Kai Luum." There the guests rough it, in tents along the beach (covered by thatch canopies). Eco-tourism. Meals taken together in a big tent, sand floor. "Save the tortugas." "Honor system" bar. Diving shop. Adult castaways in athletic communion with nature. No kids under 16.

We visit Kai Luum for Thanksgiving dinner. (Children OK this once.) Turkey with all the trimmings. Lantern lit and festive. The waiters are silent, anonymous. At Kai Luum the "staff" are young North American men and women who stop for a moment at our table to chat. But the lack of any contact, even brief, with the non-White people working here feels oppressive. . .after the very friendly scene at Lafitte.

The Posada Capitán Lafitte and Kai Luum were founded together and still share some facilities. But the former is owned and managed by Mexicans, the latter by North Americans. The waiters, cleaners, beach sweepers, at both places are largely (Yucatec) Mayans.

How many different homes away from home are there in the tourist universe? "Authentic" San Cristóbal; the hotel scene at Cancún ("Miami Beach gone wild," someone called it). Kai Luum, Lafitte,. . .Are some of

these places less exploitative than others? Could we choose to be good tourists? Staying at the smaller establishments? Locally owned? (But what hierarchies of class, race, or ethnicity are hidden by the word "local?") Worth a try perhaps.

With help from the Colorado 800 number (serving both Lafitte and Kai Luum) we have selected the "good" community, the one best suited to our liberal, family values. But our choice was based on a short paragraph in the guide book. And without Ben we would probably have picked Kai Luum!

*

Voice.

"That the native does not like the tourist is not hard to explain. . . . Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives—most natives in the world—cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go—so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself."

—Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*, 1988.

*

Ruin.

In travel guides and publicity, "Maya" is almost always attached to the adjective "ancient." Ancientmaya.

"The ground was entirely new; there were no guide-books or guides; the whole was a virgin soil. We could not see yards before us, and never knew what we would stumble upon next. At one time we stopped to cut away branches and vines which concealed the face of a monument, and then to dig around and bring to light a fragment, a sculptured corner of which protruded from the earth. I leaned over with breathless anxiety while the Indians worked, and an eye, an ear, a foot, or a hand was disentombed;

and when a machete rang against the chiselled stone, I pushed the Indians away, and cleared out the loose earth with my hands."

—John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America. Chiapas and Yucatan*, 1841.

Cobá. Fabulous stone stairs rising up through trees, strewn with the small, bright-colored bodies of tourists. Tallest pyramid in Yucatan. Halfway up, a cigarette butt squashed against old rock. Then a view of *la selva*, distant lakes, electricity pylons, some mysterious bumps in the surrounding green—structures of a Mayan city.

Twelve stories up, and still no overview. Forest. At the more famous ruins (Tulum, Chichen Itza, Palenque) you get a "map" at ground level. Here, only a few patches of green have been scraped off. No way to know where you are in the large city. No way at Cobá to step back, or up. In a proper ruin you magically experience the space of another civilization and time. You expand to fill the blanks left by (produced by) excavation.

Here, we find indifferent forest. Faceless.

*

The desire.

To excavate and complete. Establish names. Redeem the lost city.

Watch out for kids! Some nasty speed bumps on the straight road to Cobá almost bring us to a halt in a couple of Indian settlements.

"No doubt there were men living in Yucatan and its adjacent areas before the Mayan occupation of that space. They took sustenance from the land and their labors and when the Mayan civilization came they contributed their labor and allegiance to it and when the Mayan civilization was broken they continued to live there, as indeed they do now, centuries later. But it was the Mayan civilization that occupied that space, and so effectively that the mark of the occupation has outlasted the civilization. The present inhabitants hardly occupy it, and are largely indifferent to its former occupation. But there are others who come there to locate and study the old sites, to clear away the vegetation and debris from them, and to rename those whose old names have been lost. The old occupation still asserts itself even though the force of its assertion is now in contrast to the surrounding desolation."

—William Bronk, *The New World*, 1974.

Atop the smallest excavated pyramid at Cobá, a stone house. Ben takes possession, asks us in, kicks us out.

According to the guide book, Cobá is a preferred place for "independent travellers," hardy souls looking for real exploration. There's a luxury hotel nearby, belonging to a Club Med chain of "Archaeological Villas." Full library (ask concierge for key). Also a sophisticated gift shop selling artistic reproductions of Maya glyphs, "quality" Indian crafts. Gourmet restaurant.

"I leaned over with breathless anxiety while the Indians worked, and an eye, an ear, a foot, or a hand was disentombed. . ."

*

Sophisticated travellers.

". . .when a machete rang against the chiselled stone, I pushed the Indians away, and cleared out the loose earth with my hands."

Judith (who studies Mayan linguistics) talks in Spanish with Luis, a waiter at the Posada Capitán Lafitte. A Mayan, he was emcee at the evening "floor show." They discuss Yucatec. Judith recognizes words and sounds that are reminiscent of Tzotzil (the language she works on in San Cristóbal). Luis wants his children to speak Yucatec, but his wife is not a Mayan. How? Visits to grandparents and other kin? Or. . .?

The waiters are all young men, living away from their families (5 days a month home leave). They have Mexican first names (Luis, Manuel, Ricardo . . .) and Mayan last names. At Lafitte they study English with an elderly "regular" (guest/employee) from the States. Pay is low, compared with the earnings of a full-time taxi driver. But room and board are provided. With English, there's a prospect of mobility to a higher paid job. Maybe in Cancún.

The young men are travelers—part of the same transnational economy that made it possible for us to get from New York to highland Chiapas in less than 24 hours, that built the straight road to Cobá, that ensured our pleasant sojourn on this bit of pure coast. Different travelers—intersecting routes/roots—we spend some amiable time together. But the Mayans living at the Posada del Capitán Lafitte are working. We're on holiday. They go home for vacation. We go abroad. Everyone dresses casually. But their flowered shirts are uniforms.

The Mayans in the dining room have first hand knowledge of our language and culture. We know little of theirs.

Judith's "expertise" begins to emerge in conversations with our fellow guests. They're surprised to hear that the waiters and cooks are Indians speaking Yucatec to one another. (Yet it sounds very different from Spanish.) And they're fascinated to learn there are thirty living Mayan languages with millions of speakers.

We begin to feel different, with superior knowledge (morality?). Our fellow guests are just "tourists." (But some have been in the area much longer and more often than we have. . .) Isn't this sense of a special experience, sensibility, or knowledge an essential part of any good trip? The sophisticated traveller's "other" is the tourist.

And the distinction is a routine production.

*

Incident.

We hover in unclenched fetal positions over throngs of fish. Every imaginable color. No language for this but cliché. Voyeurs gazing. They notice us, hide sideways in the fire-coral. Sounds of heavy breathing. And a kind of participation. As we float the fish slide off, according to the same wave. Enormous, blatant strangers. (During a shower, we might have taken shelter together, without words.)

*

Incident.

Airplane travel: heavily disciplined and anesthetized. Little individuality or interaction. Why are these people, this collection, traveling north from Mexico? Hard to read who's who. Some dress up, others down (like me) for a flight. Signs of class? The poorest aren't here. At least that's obvious. "We" cross borders with travel agents, "they" use *coyotes.*

The tourist, political refugee, anthropologist, picture bride, journalist, grandchild, missionary, technician, *opère*, diplomat, poet, scholar, soldier of fortune, physician, athlete, cook, student, sales rep. . . .each in a numbered seat.

And hitting the runway, our brakes take hold. The entire molded plastic environment vibrates uncontrollably.

Lucid moment of fear, of homecoming.

LELAND HICKMAN

September 15, 1934
to
May 12, 1991

Leland had hoped to come to Provence, this spring. Reservations for a trip last December had had to be cancelled at the last moment, 'postponed,' as they say. We know now (and suspected then) that the trip would be postponed forever, and that the voyage he'd be taking, in fact, would take him elsewhere.

Literary to the very last, what Leland had hoped to see in Provence was the Marquis deSade's castle, and the low farmhouse where Samuel Beckett lived and worked throughout the war years; were the burning pin wheels of René Char's sunflowers, and the jade blue Sorgue where Petrarch—toying endlessly with the resonance of the laurel—wrote his *Canzoniere*.

I can visit any of these sites today, quite by my self, and never—not even for an instant—feel alone. Dear man, as friend, as editor, as instigator of the art, you gave so much of your good self away that I cannot help but feel that death got the least of you. Got the pittance. Thank you Leland, for being so very much to so many of us. You are.

—Gustaf Sobin

MICHEL LEIRIS
LAST WRITINGS

(Tr. from the French by Richard Sieburth)

TRADEMARKS

A conqueror whose sole dominion is the desert.

A king whose only fool is himself.

A bomb swollen with sobs that refuse to explode.

An athlete whose muscles bunch like vellum.

A ghost who clanks his words like chains.

A bird of ill-omen preening his plumage of gold.

A barometer distressed that its needle is powerless over the weather.

An initiate of a secret society with a membership of one.

A reed that thinks it slyer not be an oak.

A monkey at a mirror, mistaking himself for man.

A Ulysses anchored in no Ithaca.

An oyster panicked for its pearl.

A samurai who, without sword or valor, is capable of committing harakiri every day.

A phantom 54 and a half kilos in his stocking feet.

A man unfortunate enough never to have known how to go crazy.

A lover whose fervors never entailed a single rash act.

A hothead who never smashed a single pane of glass.

A lousy letter-writer, even though his entire work could essentially be read as a long letter to that clear-eyed companion who was his tender and consistent confidante.

An overcast sky broken by a few clearings in the clouds.

An ordinary child with ambitions or turning into a prodigy as an old man.

A sybarite furious that his bed of roses pricks him with its thorns.

A volunteer who never made it further than the recruiting station.

A moralist who deems himself spotless if he gets through dinner without staining his tie.

A Narcissus floundering in self-criticism.

An accountant who draws up his balance sheet by heart.

An ethnographer who looked in vain for lessons among distant tribes.

An Adam who was not always blinded to the mirages of Lilith by the lovely reality of his Eve.

A revolutionary paralyzed by habit, nearly paling at the sight of blood.

A pacifist who does not believe in turning the other cheek.

A reformed aficionado of bullfights who used to love watching the spectacular slaughter of cattle and now enjoys the company of dogs.

A snob who takes pleasure in refusal but is tickled pink to have been asked.

A man whose tendencies toward suicide are at once abetted and checked by his utter terror of death.

An atheist who worships the moon.

A positivist aching for miracles.

A lover of myths who wishes they were nothing of the sort.

A spy who trades in his own secrets.

A Jonas nostalgic for the belly of the whale.

A sworn enemy of fecundity who, late in life, reproaches himself for not having given the person closest to him the child she no doubt would have loved to mother.

A St. Sebastian whose arrows face the wrong way.

A Theseus whose thread to Ariadne was always broken.

A Philemon suffering from the knowledge that he and Baucis are slowly turning into trees.

An Alice who stumbled on the snake in Wonderland.

Once, a traveller in quest of a Promised Land.

Now, a cork making its way to the sea.

Henceforth, a man left to his own, only existing by half.

Jan. 1988/Feb 1989

INERT

A lazy river
spanned by no bridge,
I barely feel the pain,
toy of a listlessness
that prevents me from doing anything
except feel my way
along my course.

TWIGS

Haunting presence: at the Vieux Colombier theater (to which I had gone as a young man with a friend of my father's who taught drawing and perhaps watercolors to the young ladies of the Legion of Honor), the actor Louis Jouvet taking a series of small bites out of a pear with his voracious pearly teeth, a pear that appeared ever so succulent in *La Folle Journée*, a minor naturalist playlet by the forgotten Emile Hazard.

*

At the Monumental in Barcelona, late one Sunday afternoon after five, the maestro Julio Aparicio, apparently roused out of his torpor by the *bronca* directed against him, executes a sequence of three or four veronicas so slow and so noble in their beauty as to be virtually statuesque, and then, having thereby proved he is not over the hill, reverts to apathetic disdain.

*

A surge of tenderness and melancholy overwhelm me when I look at the old snapshot (or rather what is left of it, since some unknown hand has snipped away the background, leaving only the figure), an image that I always carry on me and that depicts my wife as a young girl, demure in her hat and dark dress, dangling a balloon from her hands, suggestive of something frolicsome at variance with her orphan-like countenance.

*

That particular moment in an aria (especially Verdi's) when the melody, unobtrusive up to this point, suddenly stiffens, swells, and buckles, as if in the grip of a trance-like convulsion. A crucial moment in the exact sense of the term, since it locates that precise point at which intoxication crosses over into heartbreak. A moment virtually inscribed in my memory as it had been on the phonograph cylinder that I owned as a child: the father's aria in the second act of *La Traviata*, sung by a baritone by the name of Dangès, a performer whom I liked immensely ever since first seeing and hearing him in the title role of Ambroise Thomas's *Hamlet*, standing in for the illustrious Maurice Benard whom my mother so admired.

*

A bracing companion piece and an exhortation to get back down to work: a face worth its weight in meat and paint (colors applied in broad juicy slabs that jar the subject out of kilter). This at any rate is how it appears to me as I look at the self-portrait, now hanging to the left of my reading and writing table in my room at Saint-Hilaire, that my friend Francis Bacon gave me over fifteen years ago as a token of thanks for the text I had written for the catalogue of his retrospective at the Grand Palais.

Note

This small sheaf of texts, written over the last two years of Leiris's life, is composed of three items:

—"Images de marque," a declension of torqued epitaphs for the tomb of an exquisiter corpse. Written between January, 1988, and February, 1989, this was the last text whose publication (by Fourbis) Leiris personally supervised. I have selected about half the volume for translation.

—"Inerte," Leiris's last poem, probably composed in August, 1989, a few months after the death of his wife. For someone whose entire oeuvre is one long drawn-out tauromachic dance against the bull's horn of Death, this slender lyric shows a remarkable serenity, almost a willingness, at last, to let go.

—"Brindilles," a series of short prose squibs, also composed in August, 1989. A summary of the major topoi of Leiris's entire work, condensed into five brief acts.

Leiris died September 30, 1989, at the age of 89.

These "Last Writings" are published by the gracious permission of Leiris's literary executory, Jean Jamin.

—RS

REVIEWS & NOTICINGS

This Is Not A Title

In the last issue of *Sulfur* (28), my untitled article on the poets of Baghdad was preceded by a quote from Whitman under the title "Barbaric Lyricism." Some thought this the title and epigraph to my piece. It wasn't, and it's especially unfortunate to have "barbaric" attached to it, when the point was to debarbarize, if only a little, the place.

For barbaric lyricism, or lyric barbarism, there was the "Victory" parade in New York the other day, celebrating the slaughter of 200,000 people, the displacement of five million more, the "apocalyptic" leveling of a small country, the tens of thousands of future deaths from disease and starvation, and at least a decade of ecological calamity. A Patriot missile was garlanded like a Shiva lingam and paraded up Broadway; in the evening, the local pyrotechnic geniuses, the Gruccis, recreated the effect of a Patriot hitting a Scud over the Statue of Liberty, to the theme from "Star Wars."

George Plimpton and the *Paris Review* seized the moment for a fund-raising "Spring Revel" at $150 a head featuring "Dinner and Huge Fireworks Show Celebrating the Return of the Troops" aboard a hired yacht. The "Revel" committee included William Styron, Kurt Vonnegut, William Kennedy, Peter Mathiessen, Frances Fitzgerald, Norman Mailer and E.L. Doctorow, among other stars of the American "left." Said Plimpton to the *Village Voice:* "There's no political statement in this at all." Said Fitzgerald: "Things are going to happen anyway. If it's going on out there, why miss it?" Said Styron: "I don't think it's incongruous, being against the war in principle and feeling that the troops deserve a cheer."

Further in the military-literary (militerary?) complex: heavily promoted on the fall list of Farrar Straus Giroux—still reverently considered to be the last large independent "serious" literary publisher—is a biography of General Schwarzkopf.

* * *

In America, where tens of millions live alone and most people move every three years, where they rarely see their relatives, and where Main Street has been replaced by the strip and the mall, hardly anyone knows anyone any more. Or more exactly: people mainly know, and know best, the people they don't know: celebrities. The village has indeed become the global village, and the global village is Hollywood. What is the Johnny Carson Show, for example, but an amiable evening on the front porch dishing the neighbors? Even better, it is a village where the neighbors stay the same, unlike one's actual neighbors. The stable presence of their unstable lives is not only a source of daily news and developments, it is a subject—probably the only safe subject—to talk about with the local strangers.

The language of the tribe is gossip, and in perpetual, individual diaspora the need for gossip becomes insatiable. In lives where mainly nothing happens except television, and where television wildly exaggerates the danger in something, anything, happening, there is a craving for "real life"—not to live it, but to watch it. Sensationalist "news" programs, "true" crime stories, the afternoon talk shows, funny or pornographic amateur home videos: packaged real life is inevitably weird, and getting weirder. Into the safety of one's own bunker comes the mesmerizing news that what was suspected is true: the boy and girl next door—those real people—really are freaks.

And so is everyone else we've ever heard about, but don't know. American biographies—it is only America that produces biographies—are poring out every day with their emphasized bad news, bizarre and sad stories. It now seems that a life—any life, yours or mine—examined by someone else is not worth living.

This biographical imperative cuts across the strata of taste. There is even a market—or they would not be published—for biographies of contemporary poets, preferably dead, which inevitably seem to issue from houses that would never have considered publishing the poet's work.

The latest, released in the same week by W.W. Norton, are Linda Hamalian's *A Life of Kenneth Rexroth* and Tom Clark's *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life.* Both are about 400 pages long, and both wave the Bad Boy banner with covers showing their subjects not typing but engaged in what current American mores now consider to be self-destructive hedonism: smoking.

Hamalian's is by far the better book. Rexroth's life can only be compared, among the American poets, with Pound or Langston Hughes for its variety and frantic pace. Hamalian—who interviewed hundreds of his friends and enemies—needs every one of her apparently allotted 400 pages just to keep up. (I've been told that another 200 pages, dealing with the work, were cut.) The book's impossible to put down as it zips through the

chronology past the factual trees. Yet I suspect its ultimate value will be, years from now, as the groundwork for the multi-volume *Life and Times*, on the order of Painter or Edel, that Rexroth deserves.

Clark, on the other hand, relies mainly on published sources and interviews with some mutual friends, like Ed Dorn. And Olson, with the exceptions of his time as a Democratic Party boomer and at Black Mountain, spent most of his life first not writing and then writing. This gives Clark plenty of room for rumination on the work, none of it particularly illuminating. His one coup, perhaps worth reading the book, is the previously little-known story of, and unpublished correspondence with, Frances Boldereff.

[In brief: At age 39, Olson is still floundering, has written little and published less. He gets a letter out of the blue from a woman in a small town in Pennsylvania telling him he's a genius. The correspondence accelerates to the rate of two or three letters a day. Boldereff sends him into various branches of arcana that become part of the Olson canon; phrases from both their letters become embedded in the poems he's suddenly furiously writing. Almost a year later they meet for the first time, Olson's first weekend of passion. Olson, however, won't leave his wife, and for many years the pattern of frenetic letters and rare passionate meetings continues.]

Hamalian clearly starts off as an acolyte, but as she gets deeper into Rexroth's incessant philandering, paranoia, and abuse of women, her disdain grows. [It could be said that Rexroth was an emotional misogynist; Olson, even worse, an intellectual one. Both books indulge in retrospective moralizing, yet it is curious that both men were surrounded by women who deified them, even after they had found the men impossible to live with. Connie Olson, after one of many separations, says she doesn't believe in God, because Charles is her God. Rexroth's second wife is the godmother of the daughter, named after the first wife, who is born to his third wife, to whom he's bigamously married. And so on.]

Clark apparently began with the image of a pathetic, tormented genius, and then piled on the evidence; there's no sense of Olson's charisma. And a pall hangs over his book from his willful, criminal neglect of George Butterick—who unbelievably is mentioned only three times in passing as one of the disciples. Clark ends with Olson's funeral, as Olson did not: *Sulfur* readers need hardly be told that nearly everything we know about Olson, the texts of most of the poems and much of the prose, critical glosses of thousands of references, and the very existence of the third volume of *Maximus*—the volume that is, for me, his great work—is due entirely to Butterick. Clark, whatever his motives, has written a biography of Kafka without Max Brod.

Two lives that couldn't be more different: Rexroth the adventurer, Olson the bookworm. Rexroth the cosmopolitan, Olson the local hick.

Rexroth the Don Juan, Olson the timid. Rexroth in the American wilderness, Olson obsessively researching the West for years before actually going out to see it. Rexroth the Buddhist and Christian, deep in the selflessness of ritual and meditation, Olson the Jungian, deep in the symbols of self. Rexroth compulsively surrounded by people of all types, Olson by a few disciples and, in the last years, living alone in an apartment piled with trash where the phone never rang, writing on every available surface, even the walls, sleeping all day and wandering empty streets at night. For the life of an American poet, it is Rexroth's that is the more incredible.

Most incredible now, when he is remembered but largely unread, is that Rexroth was—alone with Hughes, and Pound in the teens and twenties—an American poet who was a public intellectual figure, famous among general readers. (Ginsberg's celebrity is another matter.) His public exposure in the fifties and sixties seems unimaginable for an American poet today: a weekly radio show, a twice-weekly column in the *San Francisco Examiner*, book reviews or articles once a month in *The Nation* and four or five times a year in the *N.Y. Times Book Review*, the twice-monthly "Classics Revisited" series in the *Saturday Review*, further articles in magazines from *Art News* to *Mademoiselle* and *Nugget* (whatever happened to *Nugget?*), records of his poetry readings, sales of 10,000 for a new book of poems (and 100,000 for the Chinese translations), interviews in the national media, even talk of a television show—plus the endless local discussion groups and readings he organized. Rexroth, in other words, led the life generally available to a poet nearly everywhere except in America.

Olson, however, led a more normal American poet's life. He died with most of his work unpublished, and most of the rest out of print. He spoke grandly to his "fellow citizens" of the "Republic of Letters," but had only a few devout followers. He planned national and international institutions and symposia and think tanks to get the message out, all of which came to nothing. There is a sad moment in the letters to Corman where he compares *Origin* magazine—*Origin* magazine, of all things—to Mao's band in the Yennan caves.

Finally, it is true that few among us could survive the investigation of a biographer and not emerge a monster. Taking out the garbage is not the stuff of biographies, the garbage itself is: the petty cruelties, the hypocrisies revealed in the archives of correspondence, the mistakes and indiscretions, the bad days, bad habits, bad blood.

But the deeper question is what the biography of a poet does to subsequent readings of the work. It cannot help but localize the poem, cheapen it, fix it permanently in its biographical interpretation. So now we know that among Pound's last words, the great lines "When one's friends hate each other/ how can there be peace in the world?" refers to the three women in his harem. So now we know that Rexroth, the century's great

celebrant of married love was, simultaneous to those poems, writing mash-notes to half-a-dozen other women. So now we know who Frank Moore is, and why Olson wondered. (In a letter to Ferrini in the first *Origin* he had revealed what's buried behind Lufkin's diner.) Is "The Librarian"—and the most mysterious lines in American poetry—ruined? And what happened to his own reading of the lines, from writing them (when he's clearly talking to himself) to publishing them (when he must consider their effect)? Frank Moore troubles my insomnia.

* * *

Future *PMLA* article: The signature Olson syntax—the dangling participles which Creeley picks up, and the sudden exclamations—always seemed to come from nowhere, certainly not Massachusetts. Then the other day it struck me: Hopkins. One of many examples:

> . . .My heart in hiding
> Stirred for a bird, —the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

* * *

Most Persuasive New Defense of Traditional Prosody: "Prosody remains embedded in the finished work. . .[like] the armature in a statue: an essential part of the finished structure. We do not judge a statue by its armature, any more than we judge a beauty contest by the X-rays of the competitors. But what the X-rays show is essential to beauty; without the armature of the skeleton Miss America or Mr. Universe would collapse to a heap of flab. . ." (John Frederick Nims, *The Six-Cornered Snowflake.)*

—Eliot Weinberger

A MEIOTIC VIEW OF HISTORY: Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*. New York, W. W. Norton & Co., 1991.

> "The intense satisfaction we derive from reading an allegory indicates the degree of difficulty there is in bringing one off."
>
> —Frances M. Boldereff,
> *A Blakean Translation of Joyce's CIRCE*

1. It's hard to imagine anyone's deriving "intense satisfaction" from Tom Clark's *Charles Olson*, in spite of Clark's considerable journalistic skill and his evident labor to achieve the smoothness of his product. To the quick eye the book reads briskly enough, and it's only on reading passages aloud you realize there's little pleasure to the ear. (The flatness of Clark's sound is especially noticed after the reader experiences lengthy quotations from Olson himself.)

The author is not to be faulted for having had to prune and simplify his complex story, undoubtedly to keep the book manageable according to publisher's requirements. It's well and artfully shaped. Among many recent literary biographies (I think of those of William Burroughs, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound) that are crudely compounded, clutches of unassimilated info, Clark's book stands out. But the author's constant belittlement of, and apparent ill will towards, his subject spoils any "intense satisfaction" in his achievement that might otherwise be aroused. As the reader turns the 350 pages packed with invidious authorial insinuation her or his necessary initial sympathy with the biographer is gradually withdrawn. What remains is unsatisfied suspicion, not only of the "truth" of the narrative, but of the most basic premises of the biographer's interpretation.

2. I won't rehearse the story the book tells, ostensibly a "factual" biography though qualified by its subtitle. It's not a literary or philosophical investigation of Olson's writings, his ideas, their sources and analogues. If Clark had attempted such his efforts would most likely have been ludicrous, as his unwittingly parodic summaries of Olson's lectures suggest: "For those few who could follow him, however, the poet had much to say, laying down an intriguing trail of clues that led directly to the philosophical center of his mysterious later work. Introduced to the mysticism and dogma of thirteenth-century Old Norse poets and Muslim angelic philosophers, the bewildered Midwestern college crowd was in effect being shown Olson himself in his own latest creative incarnation. . ." (Clark, p. 340). Clark's stance here as often elsewhere is that of the perplexed no-nonsense American naïf, the honest dumbbell scratching his head.

The narrative runs smoothly enough, and for readers familiar with previous studies of Olson's work, none of which was primarily biographical, it presents genuine surprises and insights (the importance in Olson's life and work of the brilliant writer and commentator on Bruno, Blake, and Joyce, Frances Boldereff Phipps is revealed for the first time), as well as coherent accounts of the extremely varied social milieux in which Olson moved.

Writing this book evidently required a serious commitment of time and labor that is to be respected. Its veracity (there are many factual errors, but the greatest number of these can be dismissed as trivial) will at some point

be investigated by scholars having access to all the unpublished letters, notebooks, and taped conversations on which Clark has drawn, and which are documented (though without noting the extent of his elisions) in the notes at the end of the book.

Clark has written a plausible story, slickly fascinating. But, while I would not accuse him of insincerity, or "malice prepense," the program of the book, its "hidden agenda," is not immediately apparent, perhaps is even *dissembled*, and this it is that is of particular interest. The rhetoric of motive assumed in the writing needs to be illuminated and its artfulness made explicit.

3. In Clark's subtitle, "The Allegory of a Poet's Life," he stakes out what will be his plan of operation. (He doesn't write *"An* Allegory of *the* Poet's Life," though such chiasmus of articles reflects more accurately the trope effected.) Allegory is a subtle art, and interpretation of reality is its essence.

It's possible Clark doesn't realize the irony of using this aesthetic method, utterly opposite to Olson's own phenomenology of historical investigation, upon the materials of Olson's life. Nowhere in the book does Clark display the slightest comprehension of the intellectual problems that make Olson's methodology interesting and important. He earnestly cites more than once Olson's favorite quotation from Keats' letters, "A Man's life of any worth is a continual allegory," but without recognizing that his own over-simplification (what Olson called "parabolic vantage") of allegorical application is a misunderstanding of Olson's use, which discriminates between method (as dynamic) and static conclusion. In Olson's, and Erich Neumann's, terms, Clark makes a Secondary Personalization of Prime Material; his is a failure to grasp the Dogmatic Character of Reality (see Olson's Beloit Lectures *Poetry and Truth).*

"Allegory says one thing and means another," Angus Fletcher writes in the Introduction to his masterful and richly suggestive literary study *Allegory*. Literary allegory connects and refines. It polishes and smooths over rough surfaces, subordinating detail to a general tone. Clark has fulfilled that declared intent; the book is honed and neat, the actions, the happenings, physical, emotional, intellectual, of Olson's life are carefully ordered to give the final unified plausible impression Clark desires. In what Olson would deem a "wilful Act" Clark makes the book successfully cohere. Its loss is an absence of insight intrinsic to the adoption, under the guise of his overweening allegory, of a superficial and venal reality view. If the image of Olson proposed by the book becomes the popular and accepted view of the poet it will be because it feeds a public, academic and other, hungry for the rhetoric of belittlement, disparagement, meiosis.

4. The central rhetorical figure to effect the purpose of belittlement is classically called *meiosis*. "The figure *meiosis* lowers its object, rather than making it of higher esteem," Fletcher writes in *Allegory*. The great rhetorical treatises of the English Renaissance knew it well. It is called by George Puttenham in *The Arte of English Poesie*, the "Disabler." Meiosis abases and plucks down, Henry Peacham writes in *The Garden of Eloquence*, and Hoskins, in *Directions for Speech and Style* considered it the opposite of amplification. In *Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery* Rosemond Tuve shows how meiosis frequently accompanies or is superimposed upon, irony, another rhetorical mode. "Both in its derisive and in its ironic form, meiosis is obviously a figure of marked usefulness in all writing with a satiric bent," she notes. Frequently in modern literature the tropes and schemes of diminishment are used in a way that is often confounded with anti-allegory, as Wallace Stevens misused the term "anti-poetic" in discussing W. C. Williams. Fletcher writes "It is in this way that allegory becomes what Frye has called 'anti-allegorical,' by which he means ironical. He sees this trend occurring with increasing force as we approach modern times; he sees in it an aspect of the general ironic (we might more accurately call it the meiotic) trend of modern literature."

Since he is writing in the clipped, ostensibly anti-rhetorical prose of the 20th century, Clark doesn't use so many obvious figures of speech as earlier poetic discourse employs, but the figure of belittlement dominates his allegorical reading of Olson's life. "Even where the allegory is more naturalistic," Fletcher writes, "when it appropriates the language of contemporary journalism, it bottles up concepts in the form of caricatures." Clark's renditions of Olson's "ideas" are such caricatures.

His analysis of Olson's character is couched in terms of an easily apprehended and simplified Freudian psychology, no problem for the average reader. Its use enables him confidently to identify what he assumes to be Olson's real motives: "The division he felt in himself was now so radical, he secretly believed, as to actually produce two distinct 'forms of behavior,' and in effect two different Charles Olsons." (Clark, p. 118) (No matter how secret Olson's beliefs were, they don't remain hidden from Clark!)

Clark's fundamental postulate in fixing Olson's character is that of the popular biographer Catherine Drinker Bowen, who in her *Biography: The Craft and the Calling* writes, "What is biography but the story of a man or woman in conflict with himself. . ."

This postulate allows Clark to erect his major tropes of belittlement, Olson as Con Artist, Poseur, Stage Manager, Manipulator and Opportunist. Over all looms the guiding archetype of the Trickster, but Clark subsumes the shamanic character under his meiotic figure of the Manipulative Con Man. It was Robert Creeley, Clark writes in the Acknowledgments for his

book, "who early on proposed as hypothetical models for Olson biography the Freud/Bullitt life of Woodrow Wilson, a highly speculative study of the Oedipean formations of the Great Man character type, and Hugh Trevor-Roper's classic account of brilliant intellectual bluffing, *The Hermit of Peking*. Stressing the latter line of interpretation, Olson's student and good friend Edward Dorn gave me a perceptive account of him as creative gambler, a 'great intellectual punter constantly at the gaming tables of thought and literature.'" (Clark, pp. ix–x)

While Clark listened to and followed up these fatuous and possibly malicious suggestions, Creeley and Dorn are not to be held responsible for Clark's stance, which is a projection of or correspondence to the emblematic figure of Olson as Trickster that was already in process of formation in his own psyche. An evident partial identification with the Trickster archetype enables Clark to conflate the figure sympathetically with that of the Rebel—*Poète Maudit* in revolt against an alien and hateful society.

Here he becomes trapped in his own irony. His sympathy with and pity for the Artist-out-of-step-with-Culture, a Sacred Monster, is rhetorically subverted by his own syntax of belittlement and disvalue. The reductionism implicit in Clark's projected psychology infects the entire *kosmos* of the allegory. (I use *kosmos* in Fletcher's double sense of extended ornament become world-image.) The allegory then takes on the meiotic figure of covert lowering. "Levelling and lowering is then a primary function of kosmos no less than its elevating function," Fletcher writes, "By likening an object we wish to dispraise to a worse object we achieve a downward movement." And since "Allegory belongs ultimately in the area of epideictic rhetoric. . .since it is most often used to praise and condemn certain lines of conduct or certain philosophical positions" the effect of Clark's meiotic use of allegory in the biography is not only to cheapen the psychological world of Olson's motives but to create a kosmos of disparagement of all human motivation. That his level of allegory is covert does not mitigate its impact.

It is an intense competitiveness and self-seeking that Clark's rhetoric projects on Olson. Life exists only as agon in this world-view. There is no room for lovable qualities. The compassion Creeley detects in this biography, according to his dust jacket comment, is certainly not flagrant.

5. From Olson's *The Special View of History*, based on a series of lectures at Black Mountain in 1956: "How to say it, so that it is abundantly clear. It isn't at all unlike Keats' proposition that a man's life (he was speaking of Shakespeare and his plays) is an allegory. It is that one does have a life to live, exactly that much. And that because it is that much, and it is one's own, it has a scale. That is, it isn't more of same, or so much 'humanity' and all that, any of the counters now offered (which lead on the other side instantly

to hypostasizings. Diminishments and hypostasizings, about what we have offered us."

Clark's *Charles Olson* offers us just such diminishment and hypostasis. His minifying biographical allegory displays what may be called a meiotic view of history. And of course a meiotic view of kosmos.

In spite of Edward Dorn's benign endorsement on its book jacket ("Only a biographer as discriminating as Tom Clark could have done justice to this troubled and vibrant giant."), which sounds as if Dorn were practicing to write copy for book-club puffs, Tom Clark is neither a discriminating biographer nor does he present what Dorn terms a "total picture of Olson." The book will neither hearten nor satisfy the discriminating, but in its plausible facility it may please the hasty reader and inhabitant of the New Establishment whose vested interest in comfortable meiotic simplifications it agreeably serves.

—Gerrit Lansing

Lives and Large Systems: New Biographies of Charles Olson and Norbert Wiener

1

Tom Clark's *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life* is a bad book.

It is not a bad book because it is badly written. In fact, as a commercial product of writing, it is quite effective: it moves right along, the language is superficially engaging, it seems to have alot of big implication without burdening its reader with tiresome analysis. It belongs however to a whole category of bad books which came into prominence during the 1980s. Although these books vary over a wide-range of sophistication levels, they are all bad because they represent a loss of intellectual nerve. The popular prototype is Robert Fulghum's *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten.* The function of such writing is not to generate thought but to stop thought and distract attention. Of course, for more sophisticated readers, more sophisticated strategies for filling attention without requiring thought are necessary.

The book was the first mass-produced consumer item, but it was always peculiar as a commodity. Producing and selling writing was not

quite the same as producing and selling hogs or even cars. One could sell the material object but not the "content." In the past twenty years, a pervasive, synchronic array of cultural changes have allowed the appearance of new book-products in which the distinction between book and content breaks down: content too is now material. The book as commercial product has been greatly improved: it has been made more attractive as an object of desire and more useful to the vested interests as an instrument of control. The mechanisms of the book trade are, of course, complex, but it has much the same profile as the music business which has managed successfully to market images of rebellion to self-controlling consumers. It is now only with great difficulty that the book undermines itself as product and diverges from its status as a commodity by claiming its connection with a structure of ideas outside of itself, on the one hand, or a more generous concreteness (Whitman's "whoever touches this book touches a man"), on the other.

There is no simple explanation of this change. Aspects of it can be traced to changes in the publishing industry, changes in the relationship of print and electronic media, changes in social values in a broad sense, changes in philosophy in the academy. It is a kind of writing which appears in a culture which cannot face its own emptiness and lack of resources to overcome its self-destructive tendency. It is the mark of decadence in the grand sense.

The great theme of the 1980s was the futility of knowledge: if you can't know *everything*, according to the orthodox line of thought, you cannot know anything, and *as* you do not know everything, you can do nothing but hope. Skepticism is the epistemology of reactionary politics. It is the theme of the politics of both Heidegger and Reagan, a theme which unites fashionable cultural critics and middle American voters (albeit with considerable difference in the complexity of the rhetoric).

If it were merely a matter of the value of a name in the literary market place, Clark's book would not be worthy of serious attention. Olson has not been read, and, though this book will foster his continued neglect, literary reputations are not now very important. The highest end of the pecking order of poets is so low that who is up and who is down makes no difference. It is sad, however, that perhaps one reader in a thousand who will come to this book will need to know what Olson might teach, and Clark does not give such a reader even a clue what he or she might find in Olson's writings.

Thomas M. Disch, reviewing *Charles Olson* in the *Los Angeles Times* summarizes the book in these terms:

> At Black Mountain, an experimental college in rural North Carolina, Olson was a pioneer in the dismantling of the college

> core curriculum and its replacement by a kind of autodidacticism that differed little from autointoxication. He was, in short, the high priest of high times, and Tom Clark's biography is a balefully fascinating account of both the man and the milieu he did so much to form. . . . The poet's life becomes, as the book's subtitle proclaims, a cautionary parable concerning the price to be paid for megalomania, a hunger for sycophants and too much booze and drugs.

Of course, reviewers may use books for whatever purpose they like, as Disch uses Clark's biography in support of the educational philosophy of Bennet, Bloom, and their company—the academic equivalent of Christian fundamentalists—but Disch gives the book a fair reading. Clark makes Olson's life available for precisely such a use.

There is something odd about the tone of the book, however, and Disch is almost discerning enough a reader to pick up on it. He notes a discrepancy between Clark's account of Olson's life and the dust-cover blurbs. I wonder if Clark intended to produce the book which, for example, Andrei Codrescu describes: "Olson was a grand American genius like Melville, Whitman, and Pound. He mapped and defended a special American poetic liberty that is gravely threatened today."

Let me propose a paranoid fantasy, something like the body snatchers. I do not know that it is relevant to *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life*, but it might be:

The forces which now threaten liberty in every domain of life are so powerful that they can invade and use even some of those who *intend* to be agents of opposition. If writers lack knowledge or profoundest conviction, they are liable to be invaded and have their skill turned against their intent even without their knowledge. The mechanisms could be various: it might involve an unconscious desire on the part of the writer to make an acceptable product or editors who are able to recast a writer's work in terms which he or she lacks the moral courage to reject.

At any rate, there is something odd at the center of this book. It is not just a hatchet job on Olson, it also justifies the dismissal of an entire range of poetries to which the poetic work of Clark himself and many of the dust-jacket commentators belong. The Gulf War has been used to proclaim America's recovery from the infamy of Viet Nam. Clark's text will be used, as Thomas Disch uses it, to proclaim America's recovery from the artistic infamy of the fifties and sixties.

2

Charles Olson is addressed to what used to be called the "middlebrow" reader. Now, of course, all hierarchies are unfashionable. Everyone has

been swallowed up in postmodern egalitarian inauthenticity. Books like this one, however, are still middlebrow. They find their niche in markets which are insignificantly small in relation to the mass market but large enough to return a publisher such as a Norton a little extra profit and, more significantly, to improve its image as a publisher of text books (indeed it might be seen as a kind of justification of the Norton anthology of twentieth-century poetry).

Clark makes a fundamental error about his subject. He treats Olson's life as the life of a personality—a movie star or a First Lady, who, lacking all other qualities and accomplishments, can only be treated as the subject of gossip. There has seldom been a writer whose life was so exclusively his or her work. Clark however tells us nothing about Olson's life *as a poet*. When he tries, he repeatedly betrays the superficiality of his understanding of his subject. At these times, even his usually snappy prose style deserts him, and he begins to sound like the host on talk radio. Of Carl Sauer, "Olson would soon come to regard him as a creative 'father' and forerunner in the intellectual adventure of earth history." Or like bright undergraduates who have not read their assignments but can "pick up" enough to make, if not pressed, a comment which sounds almost right: "Whitehead seemed to offer a figurative or allegorical frame of reference in which the poet as *muthos*-maker could easily feel at home."

There is nothing *easy* about feeling at home with Whitehead. If Clark would have looked at Olson's copy of *Process and Reality* in the Archive at the University of Connecticut, he might have had some measure of what it means to read a book, to *know* something, and to try to find one's *own* use for a body of thought so massive. Olson's copy of *Process and Reality* is a record not of one careful reading but of many readings, many pages are heavily annotated, sometimes the date in which a passage was noted is recorded. Whitehead was a frame of reference which was fashioned, carefully and thoughtfully. Olson did not read because he was expecting to take an examination but to feed his own work. Clark assumes that no one could *know* what Olson-Maximus proposes to make use of. This is the assumption that one would expect of an academic biographer, whose task it is to excuse his colleagues' ignorance of Olson. It is sad that it is also the assumption of a poet-biographer.

Olson, however, is noisy and troublesome. He is not merely another idealistic poet who can be reined in by the methods of Deconstruction. Indeed, he is more rigorously and insistently anti-metaphysical than Derrida. Moreover, his appeal to concreteness cannot be dismissed as a sentimentality, as Whitman's proposal of physicality may be. For the safety of the middlebrow Republic, a distraction of the kind which Clark provides is necessary.

I do not mean to imply a conspiracy. In a culture where everyone is trying to cover his or her own ass, where everyone is devoted to the minimum necessary conscious, conspiracy does not require conscious collusion. No one wants to be awakened from the great comforting sleep, and they apply the golden rule: Do not awaken others for fear they may awaken you.

3

Pesi R. Masani's *Norbert Wiener, 1894-1964*, offers a reasonable comparison to Clark's biography of Olson. Olson and Wiener were acquainted with one another. Olson had a pre-publication copy of Wiener's book *Cybernetics*, and he quotes Wiener in two crucial poems which are separate by a period of twenty-five years (Olson's attention to Wiener was lasting). They were both heavily influenced by Alfred North Whitehead, both were New Englanders, and both were problematic personalities.

Masani's study of Wiener is not a great biography. The prose is a little creaky, and Masani's treatment of Wiener as a social thinker is thin, but it does the job of biography responsibly. Masani attempts to give us what is *important* about the life of his subject. He notes:

> The basic proposition of cybernetics that
>
> signal = message + noise
>
> and that the message, and not the noise, is the sensible term in communication, is applicable in all sorts of contexts with suitable re-interpretation of the three terms. It sheds some light on how the responsibility of writing about Wiener should be met. Wiener is the signal, and for us the Wiener-message, and not the Wiener-noise, must be of significance. . . .

Wiener was remarkable in that he was an important scientist—one of the group with Turing, von Neumann, Shannon, and McCulloch, who completely re-oriented the scientific project after World War II. Unlike many of his colleagues, however, Wiener also saw the technological developments for which he was in part responsible in broad social terms. In his closing paragraphs Masani writes of Wiener, "Few others have comprehended reality so profoundly, and so clearly seen the way out of the present spiritual impoverishment." We may not finally accept this assessment, but Masani gives us the evidence for this claim which is, for him, the Wiener-message.

Clark gives us the Olson-noise. He seems to know nothing about the Olson message.

4

This is a reasonable time to read biographies of Olson and Wiener. Both of these men offer opportunities to give thought to the world as a vast, intricately articulated system of a kind which we have only begun to know during the last fifty years. For the first time, we have a totality which does not reduce the world to a totalitarian object or a totalitarian subject. Of course, the Romantic dogma equated the aesthetic *symbol* with totality, but, each in their own way, Olson and Wiener were involved in a series of discoveries which led to the conclusion that we inhabit a world in which *literally* the totality is in every part.

This is not easy to understand. It involves a level of abstraction which was not available before this century, and no one is completely comfortable with it. Of course, the very mention of higher abstraction will send poets and poetry lovers of a certain stripe scrambling to find a rock to pick up or a tree to hug. Pound's "Go in fear of abstraction" is the first rule of Creative Writers and their pedagogical institutions. Olson's work is important precisely because he shows at what cost one gains concreteness of life in the face of abstraction.

The problem with abstraction ever since the Greeks is that it has never been abstract enough. It has been so close to the concrete that the abstract and the concrete have been confused. All systems—at least since the time that Heraclitus declared (in a passage which Olson often quotes), "Man is estranged from that which is most familiar"—had admitted only two loci or values, objective and subjective, hopelessly split; in self-consciousness; even painfully split. At the same time, however, objects and subjects were mutually linked and dependent upon one another. There have been thought-things and thing-thoughts—fuzzy agglutinized objects of eye and mind.

In this century a new, previously unknown level of abstraction has appeared, and as a result the relationship between thought and concrete life has profoundly changed. In their different ways, Olson and Wiener articulate aspects of this new thought which transforms life almost beyond recognition.

As a theory of *systems* and *information*, the new abstraction has no particular content. It is not a theory of physical nature, biological nature, numbers, psyches, societies, computers or other kinds of machines, languages, games (or simulations), poems, plots, or pieces of music, but of *all* of these things or, more precisely, of what all of these things have in common. Moreover, what constitutes a system is a function not of things in themselves but of their users. Logics are not *given* in the Beginning or any other time, they are created by their own use. Logics are cross-section pictures of purposes, independent of substance: "I see no essential difference," Wiener writes, "between a materialism, which includes soul as

a complicated type of material particle, and a spiritualism that includes particles as a primitive type of soul." We may now think of concatenations of minerals, bodies, and languages (including both alphabetic and arithmetic languages) as single systems. The designers of computer interfaces, for example, *must* think in these terms, and I believe the poets must also, not to emulate the machine but to insure that people keep the upper hand on the mechanical prostheses by which they extend themselves.

Although the mathematics in Masani's biography appears at first a little daunting, each of the technical chapters is organized so the principles are explained in general terms before the formalism is introduced. It will, however, repay the non-mathematical reader to look at the mathematical equations from an aesthetic point of view. Wiener himself looked at them at least in part in aesthetic terms. This passage announces one of Masani's principle themes:

> In the infancy of the human race, each situation was perceived by the mind as a blurred organic whole. Man's earliest mode of perception was mythic rather than logical or analytic, and it is a profound saying that "poetry is the mother tongue of humanity" [Ernst Cassirer]. Indeed, human life would be intolerable without the mythic mode of perception: great art hinges on such perception.
>
> It is not generally recognized, however, that as science advances it is forced to view reality from widely different perspectives, and that the integration of these divergent aspects into a unified whole calls for the same sort of maneuver that the poet undertakes. . . . It is in this undertaking that the role of mathematical symbolism is decisive.

Masani manages to convey a sense of Wiener's life and work in terms of this mathematical poetics. Although I prefer Steve J. Heims's treatment of Wiener's "philosophy" in the broader sense in the dual biography, *John von Neumann and Norbert Wiener: From Mathematics to the Technologies of Life and Death* (MIT Press, 1980), Masani gives a better account of Wiener's work as a scientist.

The last time I saw Robert Duncan before he got sick, he spoke of Olson and himself as "cybernetic poets" and insisted that it was this fact which distinguished them from their predecessors and their contemporaries. What he meant, I think, was that they alone had tried to move poetry from a blurred perception of organic wholes to precise, concrete perception of organic wholes—that they had in effect accepted the responsibility of producing a poetry which was contemporary with Wiener, Shannon, and McCulloch.

Relatively few artists have entered a space of art in which form depends strictly upon the totality of the living of those forms. Duncan mentioned some of the painters—Pollack, Kline, Jess—and I insisted upon Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Sun Ra, and Cecil Taylor.

5

In times of profoundest intellectual transformation, there is literally no way to say what can be said: the old forms have to be revalued in terms of a thought which cannot emerge until *after* they have been revalued. Systems thinking gives us means to think about this paradox of classical logic.

Consider the term "allegory" which Clark uses in his title and which is central to the method of his biography. He is referring specifically to a passage from one of John Keats's letters—"A man's life of any worth is a continual allegory"—which interested Olson in the middle-1950s. Clark thinks of allegory as Bunyan thought of allegory: the content is abstraction. Olson, however, was hearing something else. It was a term which he hoped to wrench out of an old context and use in relation to the emerging language. *The Special View of History* as a whole might be read as Olson's attempt to revalue the term. The fact that allegory had not been a fashionable literary form for some centuries made it susceptible to this kind of (mis)treatment. Just before he quotes Keats in *The Special View*, Olson writes:

> The condition of man is a continuum we hereby declare to be called as it has always been meant, history. It means "knowing": Hister. Find out what it's about. Can one offer a determinative more exact to that which any one of us is impelled to do without any choice in the matter? That is, otherwise one is forced to talk about "life." But it has never been a satisfactory word because it means what nature offers, not what man DOES. One can indeed live. But curiosity? It is only satisfied by the creation of the history of one's self.

The poet is at once the maker of the life and its knower, or at once its knower and its maker. That is, the content of continual allegory is not abstraction, as Clark's biographical method assumes, but more allegory. When abstraction allows this degree of self-reference, where the person is at once the subject and object of his or her own doing, everything is changed.

In an essay published two years after the lectures in *The Special View*, however, Olson recognized that "continual allegory" was an inadequate term for Melville's work and certainly his own. He used the term to make

an important transition, then he threw it away as it no longer served his purposes:

> Melville couldn't abuse object as symbol does by depreciating it in favor of subject. Or let image lose its relational force by transferring its occurrence as allegory does. He was already aware of the complementarity of each of two pairs of how we know and present the real—image & object, and the action & subject—both of which have paid off so decisively since. . . .
>
> Melville wouldn't have known to say it this way, but he was essentially incapable of either allegory or symbol for the best of congruent reason: mirror and model are each figures in Euclidean space, and they are not congruent. They require a discontinuous jump.

Clark abuses object as symbol. If a life is to be lived in a continuous space—that is, a space where measure is possible and poetry is, therefore, a primary mode of knowledge—allegory will not suffice. Allegory belongs to a discrete spatial manifold, and poetry of the order that Olson sought requires a continuous spatial manifold. Thus, his investigations into non-Euclidean geometry were necessary. Clark asserts that Olson was unable "to grasp the technical fine points of such work. . .," but again had he made the effort to look at material which is readily available in the Archive, he would have discovered that Olson *did*, in fact, understand a good deal of non-Euclidean geometry. While he wasn't interested in technical topology, he understood satisfactorily what it *meant* in terms of its implications for the art of poetry. His notes on the technical aspects of *Process and Reality*, which is ultimately understandable only as a philosophy of mathematics, or Herman Weyl's *Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science*, for example, make it clear that he was interested in poetry, not mathematics, but it will be no less obvious that he was not a mere dabbler, as Clark suggests.* He was dealing with formal matters at a level of abstraction where mathematics and natural language are indistinguishable from one another.

There is reason to believe that Olson was as serious and competent in the pursuit of his work as Wiener was his. He was also as impulsive and as capable of making wrong guesses which sometimes seriously misled

*It is clear, at any rate, that Clark is only guessing about what Olson knew and is depending upon the fact that any non-mathematician who speaks of mathematics will be widely perceived as a phony. Had he made the effort to look at Coxeter's *Non-Euclidean Geometry*, to which he refers, he would have known that it was an introductory textbook, not a volume one would consult for "recent discoveries" as he reports.

him. He was as capable of mistreating his friends and associates. Marsani deals with this aspect of his subject insightfully. Clark understands Olson at best as a bumbling, incompetent nerd or freak in the sideshow of the literary underground, at worst as a kind of Jungian monster, who projects his own boring psychodrama on the people and world around him. Happily Olson's work is available to the committed general reader. For biographical information on Olson, for the time being at least, I can only recommend the chronology in George Butterick's *A Guide to the Maximus Poems of Charles Olson.*

—Don Byrd

Baffling Means from o•blēk editions (1991) is a book of "Writings/ Drawings by Clark Coolidge and Philip Guston." The title is a mine of meanings—gold mine, land mine. *Means* can be read two ways, as a noun and a verb, and it is a tribute to both of these artists that not only do they take us down the path of that bifurcation, but they bring us back to the place where noun and verb are one, or where it doesn't matter—nouns, verbs are part of the same activity or path or door ("is my muse the door itself?" 54). In any event: *Means* are tools, strategies, mechanisms; "a method or course of action or instrument by which some act can be accomplished or some end achieved." Here the emphasis is on the act, not the end. But of course that is easy to say, but it means that the emphasis thereby falls on the quality, attentiveness, and the duplicitous cunning and reckless desires involved in the act. For the only end, especially for Coolidge, is the exploration of a very large scene of writing, the space in which everything seems to become the means; what it means *is* the means. So the verb *means*—it means *"baffling means* as follows" with all the poems and art works aspects of the definition of baffling, aspects of the purpose or intention of baffling, or the act of bringing about certain things as consequences ("friction means heat"; "baffling means___")—where all of the poems or words stand in antecedent position to these two generative words BAFFLING and MEANS.

Now baffle, or baffling is not the simplest word either. For it talks about being foiled and thwarted by the "means"—checked, interfered with, even impeded. And the root might be a word for hoodwink. The means defy solution or understanding. And the drive in these works was to make things go further, not to understand or solve them: "Further in the sense of nearly

unrecognizable as one's own." (Coolidge, Preface.) They do, however, engage both artists with a constant activity; the activity itself leads to reflection and therefore to more work (but never solution). And of course *Means* (also plural) indicates wealth, property, money—artists who draw into the page and follow their line may be indeed baffled or bewildered by the wealth they find in the site they enter. Coolidge says, in his brief preface, "Baffling means because we wouldn't know what we'd get. . . . Strange what we wanted we had never seen." The level of desire in these works is part of their power, but desire is also assured, even funky sometimes. It is rarely out of control, nor does it pretend to be. Coolidge indicates that a synonymous alternative for this title was "To Work." Precisely.

The work (made between 1972 and 1976) consists of meditative and sometimes essayistic poems by Coolidge to which Guston responded with drawings which incorporate lines and statements by Coolidge in the arch, textured-looking cartoon-like objects that are Guston's significant later style. The writing that struck me is essentially all about what it feels like really to be cooking, making, into one's praxis. The feel is extreme "negative capability": one never knows what is happening or going to happen, one is cast perpetually into doubt and uncertainty, and it is just about the greatest pleasure that there is—as if that itself were the key to the universe, and it is in one's hand perpetually as one moves it across the page.

> "Black line pushing aside ahead." (21)
>
> "The words take a hand in the line. The words/ take time, and the hands line. A line/ in the silence of else, stopless./ Surface, edgeless." (24)
>
> "The act of painting: Drawing the boundaries/ of a fire" (26)
>
> "Making any mark is to make a hole." (34)
>
> "To create is to make a pact with nothingness./ The void exacts its tribute. [. . .] Writing, I sometimes feel I/ am working with nothing. Where are/ the words?" (50)

There are also a few essay-like statements, more like a poetics in the form of poetry, discussing the isolation and unassimilation of the true artist. When I cite this material, as above, it turns into great mottos or one-liners, although of course on the page the meditations are longer. The selection Guston makes also has the effect of turning some of what Coolidge has written into brilliant aphorisms, freeze framing the ongoing writing. This

is the only loss from the process which the two engaged upon. But the flow, and stopping to examine and investigate the flow, and how one accomplished this while also honoring the baffling means are all very much at issue. Guston is (as if) offering Coolidge a very complex reflection of his own flow precisely by the practice of decoupage—separating out phrases or little sequences of statement which were important to Guston and reproposing them via another medium. Also the set-up of the book increases the two-way companionability and equality of the artists. Guston's pictures rarely are set near or next to the same page as the Coolidge words they cite. That is, there is rarely a physical match, recto to verso, between the drawing's words and the words on the poem you've just read. The total impact is like a Lissajous figure, a pendulum tracing a line which ends up in a variety of variable points, a weaving between the two "sides" (Guston and Coolidge) in which "here" is perpetually in a different place.

A question this work does not answer inside itself is the function of doing this for the careers of the two artists. By 1972, when this collaborative work began, Coolidge was 33 years old, had published 6 books, of which one trade book (Harper & Row); he had even appeared (in the late 60s and early 70s) in a number of "young poet" anthologies from trade houses, although the thrust of his work is in small presses. He had been a writer from about 1960 (born in 1939), and was present and perhaps active in many of the alternative scenes in the 60s, touching on, or into Vancouver Poetry Seminar, 1963, Berkeley Poetry Conference, 1965, New York School, 1966. By 1972 he had had an issue of a magazine *(Big Sky)* devoted to his work. In 1972, Guston was 59 years old (1913–1980). He had just withdrawn from contract with his former gallery and moved to Woodstock. According to Robert Storr's book, Guston sought out writers, Coolidge among them in some kind of reaction to/rejection of the art world as constructed. One would like to know whether Coolidge saw some of Guston's works as he wrote more (as I suspect), and also what his reading of this correspondence in poem and drawing was. (Because it does seem like an exchange of letters.) I suppose I might be asking for Coolidge's Autobiography.

Guston's iconography had just shifted drastically to funny representational icons, distilled from events and materials which had long preoccupied him. Among these are the figures in the drawings in this o•blēk book: shoe soles with lots of nice little nails, arrows and clocks, hands, sometimes paintbrushes, abstracted piles of dreck such as what one might see in a vacant lot, hairy nervous lines almost like doodles. And then there is the pièce de résistance, the real reason for these drawings—a fetal or lima-bean head with a gigantic eye like a lighthouse beacon in it or the thyroidal headlight of a bulbous car. Sometimes the head was smoking, sometimes it had 5 o'clock shadow. Always it is looking sideways, in profile, out; it

does not confront the reader or on-looker but stares, with unfillable intensity, at the presentation of objects. It is a version of Emerson's "Transparent Eyeball" crossed with R.J. Crumb Comix. And thereby says something about the romantic and transcendent artist in confrontation with the uncontrollability of time, desire, garbage, and normal culture. This artist is a "baby" by virtue of that head, even somewhat disembodied (a bowling ball visiting dream space/studio space). The head, even without a mouth shows the figure to be an omnivore, ferocious and vulnerable at once. For both artists, "The road to excess leads to one's *own forms.*" (50 and 95)

*

Necromance (published by Sun & Moon Press, 1991) is another one of Rae Armantrout's devastating books. Her poems are short, use serial procedures, concern the everyday but refragmented and refiltered and subjected to intense summary pressures. Some of the lines seem put-downs, some rich with dismissive litotes; it's as if Armantrout has vowed to distill some of the most extraordinary sights of our time, mingled for her in a paralyzing arrest of distaste, high hysteria, and mordant conniving: "Arms of pastries/ revolve/ in their clear cylinder// slowly." Not Emily Dickinson (to whom careful homage is paid in the poem "No Matter"), she reminds me more of Dorothy Parker as filtered thru Mina Loy. She is a master of insouciant juxtapositions and a pervasive atmosphere of irony. It is the cool blown up scrutiny of very American icons that gives enormous pleasure in her work:

> suburbia & freeways: "You may 'have' sex—// but those round/ sink-holes beneath/ the off-ramps,// scabbed with whatever/ flat, green stuff— ..."(47)
>
> the Pledge of Allegiance "One notion, recognizable, with temperament and bluster for real." (9)
>
> cuisine or representation : "What the cool tomato cubes forming a rosette about this/ central olive have to do with love and happiness." (20)

All these items of dailiness and consumption have made us what we are today: baffled, jaunty, cunning. "In dream language the / *troubled region* has returned as a showgirl with masses/ of fruit on her head." (16)

Armantrout is always worth reading.

*

Time Rations is a formally and intellectually inventive book of shorter poems by Benjamin Friedlander (O Books, 1991). It seems to be a book about (among other themes) the inadequacy of lyric postures about love, time, transcendence especially in face of our only adequate ethical and political site: in post-holocaust time, on those (irrational) rations. Reflected, passim, but in the poem "No Go": "I dream of/ prisons never/ built & monuments/ of fading grass// but stuck inside/ my worthless head/ are ovens full/ of human ash. . . " (24). Thus the book kicks in immediately with knowing allusions to prior lyrics: "How do I/ love 'thee'/ can't count/ the way. out. . . ." (4). And it also startles with a deck-clearing poem of bitter contempt for its genre and for the gesture of ("the stupidity of") writing: "It Gets That I Hate Words For Their Echoes, Dumb Repetitions In My Head." (10-11). We then get such subtle moves as poems facing across the page with ultimately opposing genres and cultural draws: "Kol Niedre" and "My Alba," both remade to be "about" the pressure of writing: the vital call of the word (Benjamin! Here am I, he might have said) and the sensualities of song ("I,/ ripped off & upended, gussied at dawn,/ did sleep away the meaning of the song." 14 and 15). We get crisp Zukofskian moves such as a (fine) poem and its own extension and commentary: "[History Lesson]" with imbedded allusions to Oppen, Celan and Reznikoff, and the longer "A Note on the Previous" (which recalls the bond of "Mantis" to "Mantis: An Interpretation"). Later a similar project and its mirror answer in "Poetry" and "Retitled" (37-38).There are some charming-elegant visual and colloquial inventions which go to school with Williams' circumstantiality and precision, notations of precise time, place, latitude, miles per hour, letterhead on interoffice memo, person addressed, book being read at the "moment" of composition. One of my favorite is "The Clothes List"—in which most of the items listed that comprise the poem are crossed out, some starred, some questioned. A very serious distillery and condensary is operating in the person of Mr. Benjamin Friedlander.

*

An edition of *The Tablets I-XXVI* by Armand Schwerner has appeared in Great Britain from Atlas Press (1989). (An American edition up thru XXIV appeared in *sounds of the river Naranjana*, Station Hill Press, 1983.) This remarkable work is, of course, part of the Anglo-American long poem tradition. When the works first began appearing, they were notable for a frank and bold sexuality, as well as for a self-conscious and grippingly witty textuality. The trope on which the whole is based may be known to you: these are supposedly translations and reconstructions of very primitive texts. Going beyond the terms of any good ethnographer, Schwerner has founded, rather than simply found, his tribe. Like any good translator, he

has fabricated, and not just rendered his texts. So the work is both a statement within ethnopoetics and a commentary upon it, and thus may be said to bridge a gap between "first generation" ethnopoetics and second generation (say "post-structuralist ethnopoetics"). Trying to trace this is made more difficult by the lack of dates on the different Tablets here—a small frustration.

In the first generation, the following were among the essential issues: the search for origins or primary emotional and cultural ground, the call to shamanism and poets as social/ritual actors, the renewal from the primitive (and often the idealization of it), the postulate of a basic similarity of all cultures, the rupture with ethnocentrism and the critique of Western "man." Here, in Schwerner's text, these motifs and motives are very much in evidence. They center on the body, and on its rich excreta (shit, sweat, saliva, pus, piss, sperm, earwax including, charmingly, "little squush; and wet socks" 9), and as well on sexuality. This part of the poem made a great contribution (as I have noted above) to the living theater of frankness we now demand in poetry, but some of its turns do not wear well. The sexuality is obsessive—if "primitive means complex" in some books, here, at least in the first third of the work, "primitive means fucking." There is lots of penis and testicle in these poems, and an almost comparable amount of vagina. High points here are erotic chants (III, IV, V); then there is XV, the song of a temple prostitute, serviced first by a wild ass and then by a lesbian high priestess, which makes for curious, if sensual reading. (NB: Sherman Paul interprets this section as a speaker yielding "his masculine obsessively phallic to his gentler feminine identity." In "In Love with the Gratuitous," *North Dakota Quarterly* 1986; clearly there is a good deal to discuss in Schwerner's work.) Sometimes the commentator and annotator is in evidence during this group of poems, and there are a few notable moves. Sometimes translator misses the point, in Schwerner's high and Swiftean parody of scholarship (as in the contrast between his bafflement at the various epithets for penis and the reader's evident surmise). Sometimes he so identifies with the material that he becomes enraptured: "I do not know who I am when I read this." (35)

Somewhere in the middle (around Tablets XIII or XIV and continuing) the tone changes and the text becomes more determinedly self-reflective, even lyric, more about "the lettuce [which] drains on the sill" (71). Also during this middle section (in XX and XXI) there is expressed a ferocious anger at George Oppen (or that portion of him called "the Opponent," 63), citing from "Some San Francisco Poems" in a particularly intrusive way, by borrowing Oppen's lyric outcry about death and "saying goodbye" to his wife to point to disciples "saying goodbye" to Oppen. This rage may be about Oppen's difficulty in crediting ethnopoetics (reflected as well in his letters to Jerome Rothenberg), his specific criticism of Schwerner's attitude

to this work (Schwerner's taking it as "comedy" when it was "tragedy"—certainly a long discussion is necessary there)—as well as Oppen's personal ability to be dismissive and final in his judgments, the perfect replica of a Mentor-Father in some Oedipal narrative of poetic struggle. Far later in the sequence, Schwerner has his scholar-translator say something about the pictographs he presents which I (perhaps willfully) find apposite to this situation: "Often what can be initially experienced as an entertainment, as in this case, continues as a sadness. I cannot open the inner knot . . . ."(84)

As the text evolved, the concerns of a second generation of ethnopoetics came more to the fore; they had always been part of the texture of this work, its insistent, intelligent textual practices. The visual text, with its devastating alternation between terms which are both the same and different (.....for "untranslatable" and ++++++ for "missing") provides some breathtaking plays with fragment and partial understanding. In this version of ethnopoetics the issues are: not the nature of the pure hit of the primitive, but the nature, functions, ideologies, and interests at stake in the transmission and the transmitter (the self-styled "translation" and the "scholar-editor"). Issues of appropriation, hybridization, the creolized shifting border are in play; the user or commentator on the primitive is not set apart, unimplicated in his need and his choices. There is a critique of exoticizing aspects of the original ethnopoetics, the creation of a "Them" so much closer to nature and the sensual and the animal (and the female?) than silly old "Us." Far from a mode of "going deeper," the primitive is now analyzed in our discourses about it, in the amalgams built between cultures in which no transmission is pure. Because of the hiatuses, gaps, fragmentation of the material Schwerner presents, interpretation is a central act; the "author" (Mr. ur-Aryan) is indeed in many witty ways quite dead, if not non-existent (à la Foucault and Barthes). And the residues that the scholar-translator leaves are thoroughly unreliable as well. "Truth" fails; what we have is a "play of discourses." The text becomes traces of traces, and Schwerner the trickster figure shows us that we must be unsettled. In situating itself amid these ideas, Tablet XXVI is a tour de force summarizing many of the rampant textualities of *The Tablets*, and specializing in richly ironic self-contradictions: the attribution of early subjectivity to this ca. 3200 BCE period, while ending the paragraph "Work makes freedom." The non-Semitic origins (our primitive text writer is "ur-Aryan," 85) are a vast almost unapproachable pun on Schwerner's own Semitic origins. The scholar-translator "descends further into the interstices between tablets, between utterances, between graphemes, between pictographs" (73) and finds that "the line between redactor and author is hard to draw" (74)—an obvious, and comic, comment on this work, but a profound comment on the conditions of textual transmission. The scholar-editor-(writer) is also, as

usual, filled with jargon, new bombastic terminology, and self-importance which may, or may not, undercut his understanding of the post-structuralist trap.

I'll close by saying that one of the important parts of this text for me is its divagations, self meditations, plans (some unfulfilled) and meditations in poetics. Like the work which it caps, it is a grand document (pp. 99-108, again I wish it were dated) and offers much to the reader.

—Rachel Blau DuPlessis

John Coltrane: "Why does his legacy continue to influence our lives, our music and the arts?"

Trane emerged as the process of historical clarification itself, of a particular social/aesthetic development. When we see him standing next to Bird and Diz, an excited young inlooker inside the torrent of the rising Bop statement, right next to the chief creators of that fervent expression of new black life, we are seeing actually point and line, note and phrase of the continuum. As if we could also see Louis and Bechet hovering over them, with Pres hovering just to the side awaiting his entrance, and then beyond in a deeper yet to be revealed hover, Pharoah and Albert and David and Wynton or Olu in the mist, there about to be, when called by the notes of what had struck yet before all mentioned.

Trane carried the deepness in us thru Bird and Diz, and them, back to us. He reclaimed the Bop fire, the Africa, Polyrhythmic, Improvisational, Blue, Spirituality of us. The starter of one thing yet the anchor of something before. In the relay of our constant rise and rerise, phoenix describing its birth as birth as a description of yet another (though there is no other) process.

Trane, carrying Bird-Diz bop revolution, and its opposing force to the death force of slavery and corporate cooptation, went through his various changes, in life, in music. He carried the southern black church music, and blues and rhythm and blues, as way stations of his personal development, not just theory or abstract history. He played in all these musics, and was all these persons. His apprenticeship was extensive, and deep, the changes a revealed continuity.

The point of demarcation was Miles' classic quintet with Cannonball the other upfront stylistic vector. Style and philosophy confirm each other. As I have said before, Cannonball was Miles' confection of blues that would later be called Fusion. Simple and charming in that context, but very soon commercial on the way to not. Trane, on the other side was the way of Expressionism. Nuclear and carrying the rush of birth and death and rebirth and redeath and new life and yet again forever, what is, as the Africans said, Is Is. Ja Is (Jazz) The Come Music.

Trane emerged as the confirmation, the parallel reference to the being identified faultily as Time. The Times. He carried the power and sway, the explosions of that period. (The end of a sentence.) But the conversation, the exposition, of the Book of Life, uses periods only as rhythmic emphasis. Like beats. The music is continuous and all of what was is will. It is rhythm finally, changing motion that Trane describes.

The '60s when he appeared full up was a period, a rhythm of intensity, the Giant Steps of revolution. This is why we always associate him with Malcolm X, as a parallel of that turbulence. Trane's annihilation of the popular song, so called, was its restatement as a broader more universal popular. His "Favorite Things" could not be Hollywood's, since Hollywood is to make animalism and exploitation glamorous and Trane was trying to speak of what will exist beyond animals, what had created them, and what will carry them away as waste. What is disposed.

Trane's constant assaults on the given, the status quo, the tin pan alley of the soul, was what Malcolm attempted in our social life. And both African Americans, they carried that reference, Black Life, as their starting point and historical confirmation. The word Truth sounds bland, only if we don't understand what it is said in opposition to. Since it is transcendent, invincible, existent even past what ever else we claim exists. Even the lie must use real life as a reference to trick us, it claims to be truth. But Trane made no claims, either in his life or his work, what he did he got from life and we either recognize it with our selves or risk being wasted. Like Malcolm, what he was was reality, not to grasp it defines the quality of our consciousness, our closeness to what cannot finally be denied.

Even in this backward period, this post revolutionary retrograde era, when the social gains of the black revolution and world upsurge of liberation struggles have been thrown back for a time and we must face the open betrayal of many of those heretofore posing as revolutionaries in the Soviet Union, China, and the rest of the world, including the U.S., as we watch the steady deadly march to War. Today, we even have a trend of Negroes who tell us the American Dream is now and those of us who have not gained access to it are self destructive sluggards, womb bred muggers, a priori dope addicts, or prehistoric welfare cases.

The Fusion garbage dump heaped around us as "contemporary" music we know to be commercial reinforcement of social betrayal and prehuman addiction to animal limitation. Many of the ills of society we thought we had bypassed, transcended, eliminated, have returned in all their ugliness, whether supreme court recidivism, white supremacy, corporate domination, violent racist attacks on the streets, at our jobs, through the media. Trane like Malcolm represented our will to destroy these animal outrages. To break out of the cliched chord changes of primitive social life. Free Jazz! was parallel to Free Angela! Free Huey! The Ballot or The Bullet! Free Black People!

Since Trane's moving on we have been Paralyzed by the Imperialist Ray Gun, now ½ doped up by its Bush, but Trane still sounds inside us as the freedom we seek the total expression of our lives as the expression of the Human headed Soul, the teaching that the flaming paradise of his music is in us to create as the world we live in.

—Amiri Baraka

The U.S. poetry scene, not usually known for exuberance, exhilaration, or excess, has, in the past few years, received a remarkable influx of all three of these from its new contact with the post-Communist Soviet Union. Exchanges of readings, anthologies like the forthcoming *New Soviet Poetry* from the University of Michigan, edited by Kent Johnson and Stephen Ashby, translations, critical commentaries—all these are sure to change the face of American poetry in the '90s. But as Lyn Hejinian, herself responsible for initiating so much of the poetic traffic between the two nations, says in her Introduction to *Leningrad* (San Francisco: Mercury House, 1991), the collaborative account by Hejinian, Michael Davidson, Ron Silliman, and Barrett Watten, of their 1989 trip to the Soviet Union, the journey East has proved to be as "unnerving" as it has been "exhilarating," the "experience of the layered logics that guide events and condition situations" in the Soviet Union, displaying a "disruptive, compelling 'surreal' reality" (p. 6). That "surreal" quality is marvelously captured in this strange travel book, whose four authors are distinguished only by the icons used as a visual key to identify them, icons inspired by textile patterns designed in Leningrad in the 1920s and 30s.

What is amusing to the reader is how distinct the four voices of the supposedly nameless and faceless four protagonists are. Hejinian's is the

most concrete, the most aware of exact nuances of appearances and actions, in all their quiddities and contradictions, Davidson's the most scholarly and dispassionate, Watten's, not surprisingly, the most political (always measuring what he sees in Leningrad with what he already knows about Marxism and its Stalinist distortions), and Silliman's the most comic-surreal, his contributions reading very much like one of his own poems, the sentences not "following" one another but giving an extraordinarily vivid and honest picture of what it felt like to be a California provincial in the barely functioning, hopelessly cynical, but also intensely exciting Soviet Union. For instance:

> When I saw, on the wall of their bathroom, two toilet-paper holders, each full, my first thought was "These people are flaunting it"—later, realizing that this was a communal flat, I understood that each family had its own roll, and wondered if they cheated and stole from one another. My identity is ascertained by a photograph in a small blue book. Brigada S used to be Brigada SS. The gold in your smile shines. Who I am is this pain in my chest, ungratified desire to weep. "No more surprises!" The cab driver (not a cab driver) suddenly lurches his vehicle forward down the unpaved, rubble-strewn street—he wants to buy our dollars, sell us cameras, film, do anything. Arkadii says of another, "He's a Soviet yuppie." Just ten weeks later, the ruble has been devalued by 90 percent. Here, take my insect repellent, please. A trio of giant cockroaches construct an anthology. "I was at Woodstock—they treat me as a goddess." (p. 101)

The network of contradictions so elegantly caught here has been apparent at recent U.S.-Soviet poetry festivals. At New Langton Arts in San Francisco this past spring, a group of Soviet poets were asked what American poets had influenced their work. My hunch, especially in the case of Ivan Zhdanov, would have been the Beats, but even the Beats would have been fairly inaccessible to Zhdanov who knows almost no English. I was amused therefore, when one of the poets (it may have been Alexei Parshchikov) responded emphatically, "The Language poets!" Amused, because although, practically speaking, the Soviet poets's most intense and creative contacts have been with the American Language poets, on the whole we are dealing with two very different poetries.

Take the case of Arkadii Dragomoschenko, whose *Description* (Los Angeles: Sun & Moon Press, 1990) contains a brilliant series of poems written since 1983 in equally brilliant translations by Lyn Hejinian and Elena Balashova. So superbly have the translators caught Dragomoschenko's

rhythms and word play that readers have responded, as does Charles Bernstein in *Sulfur* 28, by saying "it's hard to believe these are not in some ways originally composed in the 'American'." I disagree, only because Dragomoschenko's lyric seems to me to have no real American counterparts; its mode recalls Rimbaud and Trakl, Celan and possibly Aimé Césaire. True, as Michael Molnar says in his useful Introduction, Dragomoschenko explodes such classical Russian traditions as the "accepted concept of poetic persona and its formal devices" (p. 12). True moreover, that, as Dragomoschenko himself explains in a headnote, prefaced with the figure:

OPSIS
SYN
TAX

"non-coincidence, deviation, residue. . . . Not signification but stratification" are at the core of this poetics (pp. 17–18). But if the Language poets's refusal of the authoritative lyric self is shared by Dragomoschenko, his poetry is much more oriented toward imaginative transformation than is, say, Hejinian's own. "Invention," he writes, "is selection—from the unidentifiable. Imagination is the intransitive action of anticipation" (p. 19). The *strangeness* at the core of Dragomoschenko's (and, similarly, of Parshchikov's) work can be seen in a poem like "Footnotes," whose first sixteen lines go like this:

> You chose the taste of dust.
> Why milk? It's a question of habit. . .
> The taste of dust, forever familiar, doesn't obligate you to
> anything
> The sting of dust isn't noticeable at first—
> There is more of me where I forget about myself
> These bright shallow niches, hollows, empty bowls,
> collar bones pristine as if sources of fire
> had let them drink, leaching out the color. A habit?
> The taste of milk is the taste of real dust
> "I knew your hair in the heat, I called each hair by name"
> Time flowed between the stones as hours echoed
> Dust over the roofs
> In the hand iron and cherries burn equally
> I knew you in a single word completely—forgotten. . .
> as if behind a skin of sun that turned into the reverse side
> of touch
> the sexless seed from which time has been subtracted. (p. 79)

As in a Hejinian or an Ashbery poem, the pronouns here remain unspecified, the images defy all logical relationship, and lyric as self-expression gives way to mythic distancing. But for Dragomoschenko, language is not the always already used and appropriated, the pre-formed and pre-fixed that American poets feel they must wrestle with. On the contrary, Dragomoschenko insists that "language cannot be appropriated because it is perpetually incomplete" (p. 21) and, in an aphorism reminiscent of Rimbaud's "Je est un autre," "poetry is always somewhere else" (pp. 20–21). Thus nature imagery, no longer a major force in the poetry of the digitalized consumer world of the West, still plays the major role: in "Footnotes," the memory of dust (its taste and sting) blends with the memory of milk, both of them oddly associated with hollow surfaces—"niches," "empty bowls," "collar bones pristine as if sources of fire."

Why collar bone as source of fire? And why, a few lines further down, is it that "in the hand iron and cherries burn equally"? Dragomoschenko's is a poem of the body, of the "skin of sun that turned into the reverse side of touch," of a touch that "knew your hair in the heat" and could "call each hair by name." "Footnotes" modulates its key terms—dust, milk, hair, skin, seed, stone, bone, snow—to create a startling memory image—of Mother "stand[ing] over us at the foot of the bed," of "the boards of a fence," of "Gloomy apples hang[ing] in the mirror"—all negative images that are nevertheless poised on the brink of sexual ecstasy: "a willow which suddenly caught fire," "The hundredth sun rushed into view." "If you simply mention birds," says the poet, "like wine they're sure to appear."

In Part 2, from which I have been quoting, the image of the "hundredth sun" is followed by the lines:

> In the grass a raven. A raven in the grass
> don't say in emerald grass
> Nobody writes that way anymore (p. 80)

The last line recalls, of course, Ashbery's "You can't say it that way any more" ("And Ut Pictura Poesis is her Name"), and Dragomoschenko is abjuring the adjectival, the traditionally descriptive. What differentiates him from Ashbery, though, is that despite the reference to "a white jet fighter entwined / in the texture of the day / evaporating," Dragomoschenko is not interested in the pop culture, the banality, the media clichés that Ashbery incorporates and parodies in his poetry. Soviet culture, as the *Leningrad* poets so acutely note, is at a very different stage from our own and Dragomoschenko's work, even in Lyn Hejinian's translation, differs accordingly. Parody, pastiche, even irony—these play a subordinate role to passion, and especially to *vision*. The big question, then, is how this variant of postmodernism will effect our own.

Sections of Lyn Hejinian's *Oxota: A Short Russian Novel* have been appearing in various journals including *Raddle Moon* and *Writing*, and the Zasterle Press (La Laguna, Spain, 1991) has now issued a section called *The Hunt*, dedicated to Zina Dragomoschenko, the poet's wife. Here is "Chapter Seven":

> Great calm is an objection.
> A deep frost rises and then sleep proceeds
> An enormous sleep composed
> A vast subordination
> In the solitude of thickness, weight—on an ice
> —each night I was a fossil
> But I was no witness
> Or sometimes my sleep was reduced to its kitchen
> The steams were trapped
> I dreamed of hunters
> One night I dreamed of the concentration that is haunted
> Each hand seen, and the objects of momentum thicken
> Russian
> With caution
> Suddenly I realize that my dreams sustain no skepticism (p. 11)

The strangeness of this poem has less to do with syntactic indeterminacy or the scrambling of causal and logical sequence that we have come to expect from Hejinian, than with imagery, incantatory repetition combined with assonance ("sleep," "dream," "each"), and the suspension of daytime consciousness characteristic of Dragomoschenko's work. The Russian poet would not be likely to write "Great calm is an objection," or refer to "An enormous sleep composed / A vast subordination," nor would he conceive of "sleep as reduced to its kitchen." These are the kind of shifts from concrete to abstract, from noun designating a state of being to noun designating a specific setting, that we expect of Hejinian. But the "solitude of thickness" in the "deep frost," the dream of "hunters," of "each hand seen," a dream that, as the poet comes to realize, "sustain[s] no skepticism"—here we may detect a new note in Hejinian's work.

The "concentration that is haunted" also characterizes Rosmarie Waldrop's new book *Peculiar Motions* (Kelsey St. Press, 1990), which is illustrated by a set of "S/kins" designed by Jennifer Macdonald. The latter's Preface explains:

> In *Peculiar Motions*, judgments and linear movements are constantly diverted and sent some place unexpected. In S/kins, a series of visual interventions conceived for *Peculiar Motions*, the images take as their point of departure the reoccuring references to skin in the text. . . . By employing both literal skins (of the body) and fictive skins (so-called in manufacturing), the meaning of the corporeal remains neither containable nor conclusive.

Macdonald's illustrations (phototechnology on vellum) provide a striking complement to such Waldrop lyrics as "Acquired Pores," which begins:

> *blemishes in the grain*
> *skin flings its shadow*
> *then though implicit*
> *in warm rain the gesture*
> *"what a day"*

On the facing page, we see what look like bits of skin peeling off a textured gray surface. And underneath the transparent skin-page, we can make out the last lines of the previous poem, "Representation," which refer to *"gestures [that] link / closely to the bone / the words / give notice."* "Closely to the bone": is there an affinity here to Dragomoschenko's "Root's bones and silver coins. . .buried between them"? Or is it merely coincidence? It will be interesting to see, as the nineties progress, how the rapprochement between the New American and the New Soviet Poetry plays itself out.

—Marjorie Perloff

The Limits of the Phantasmatic

Over forty years after Artaud's death, the final volumes of his complete works are finally appearing. This publication by Gallimard continues the monumental task so meticulously effectuated by Paule Thévenin since 1946. The most recent addition to the *Oeuvres complètes* is volume XXV, constituting the fourth volume of the *Cahiers du retour à Paris* (his Paris notebooks). These notebooks are the continuation of the *Cahiers de Rodez*

(OC; XV-XXI, begun in February 1945); the present volume covers the months of December 1946-January 1947. A synopsis of these voluminous works would be impossible, for they contain a veritable stream-of-consciousness notation of Artaud's last years: paranoid delusions, glossolalia, initial versions of poems and drafts of articles, practical notes, quotidian observations, rages of fear and hatred, diatribes, polemics, incantations, miraculations, and whatever else the psyche permits to be put into words. We read, as a typical example of his polemic against religion *and* Eros:

> The incubus is the enemy of the march of time,
> which it transforms into eternity,
> the succubus is that which tastes
> the price of time
> by the Eternal One assassinated. *[OC;* XXV, 88]

In short, these notebooks contain the raw material of his last, and perhaps greatest, works, such as *Artaud le mômo, Ci-gît, Suppôts et supplications, Van Gogh le suicidé de la société, Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu,* as well as some of his most astounding letters. (Many of Artaud's last works have been superbly translated by Clayton Eshleman, and I anxiously await the publication of his *Rodez and After* volume.) When toward the end of his life Artaud was approached by Gallimard to publish his complete works, Artaud insisted that the first volume—including his earliest poems and his first surrealist works—begin with three new texts: "Préambule," "Adresse au Pape," "Adresse au Dalaï-Lama." (The initial drafts of these texts appear in volume XXII.) The two "addresses" are revised versions of his famous diatribes published in the volume of *La révolution surréaliste* #3 that he edited in 1925. Artaud desired to recreate his own origins, insisting that we read his life-work beginning at the end, establishing a textual loop where origin and telos are conflated to form a truly "complete" work. This is a sure sign that his notebooks must be read not only as the matrix from which arose his last "finished" works, but also as providing material indispensable for a much needed rereading of his earlier, and most famous, texts.

Unfortunately, this notice is also the appropriate place to report the recent scandal involving Artaud. At the time of this writing, the second-generation inheritors of Artaud's estate (his nephews), have blocked publication of the *Oeuvres complètes* in the courts, demanding further rights over these works. Besides the moral outrage that this action must provoke—given the nearly half century long dedication to Artaud's work by Thévenin and Gallimard—it is also a major blow to Artaud scholarship, as the next volume (which already exists, but whose distribution has been withheld) contains the dossier of the famed "Conférence du Vieux-

Colombier," one of the major late texts without which a clear assessment of Artaud's ultimate work is impossible.

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Along with Daniel Paul Schreber (on whose memoirs Freud based his theory of psychosis), Artaud is certainly the most famous schizophrenic writer of the century. Yet there are multitudes of lesser known, yet fascinating, "mad" writers whose works deserve attention—not only diagnostic and linguistic study, but also literary consideration. Among the first great discoveries of such texts were those made by Jean Dubuffet, published in the *Fascicules de l'Art Brut*, and later anthologized in part by Michel Thévoz in *Ecrits bruts* (Paris: P.U.F., 1979).

There has finally appeared an English language compilation of such writing, edited by John G. H. Oakes, *In the Realms of the Unreal* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1991). This book is divided into two distinct parts: American and European works. Many of the American works are clearly those of writers and poets who, while perhaps mentally ill, are certainly well aware of our poetic heritage: we often find among these works a tone, even if not a voice or a style, made familiar to us by the writings of Sylvia Plath. Many of these works could certainly find their way into our "little poetry magazines"—a fact mitigating against their consideration as *écrits bruts*. Yet some fine discoveries have been made. In the diary of the "Living Museum" at the Creedmore Psychiatric Center in New York is a short work by one of the patients, Richard Lax, entitled "Utopian Space Bible"—it combines the best of fantasy and apocalyptic vision à la Burroughs and Ballard, plus a definite hint of T.V. sci-fi, but in a distinct and troubling voice. It begins with an introductory prayer: "See God, King of Creation, Lord of Life your slave-rigger Atom, a star going Nova (heart attack) burning out in search of himself. . ." Or consider the poignant poem, painted anonymously on a door at Creedmore by another patient, concluding with: "I die in she-devil: she devily arms." Yet another anonymous poem reveals a complexity of word-play worthy of the great *fou littéraire*, Jean Pierre-Brisset (himself made famous in Breton's *Anthologie de l'humour noir.)* Quite different is the diary of Mary MacLane, written in 1901 in Butte, Montana, an example of pure, if unusual, Americana. Yet the great revelation is that of the writings of Henry Darger (d. 1972), already acknowledged as one of the most renowned painters of American Art Brut, and whose 19,000 page diary is among the greatest documents of this sort. It is, in fact, a terrible shame that this work—as well as most of his drawings—remain inaccessible to most literary scholars and art historians, and that only three pages of his vast writings were here made available for publication.

The European material—excellently translated by Sophie Hawkes and Roger Cardinal from the French, and by Claudia Stoeffler, Peter Hoffman and Sarah Hoffman from the German—includes many works already familiar from Dubuffet's and Thévoz's presentations, plus an important selection of writings culled from the archives of the Prinzhorn collection (the most famous collection of the art of the insane, and one that greatly influenced the Surrealists via the publication of Dr. Prinzhorn's *Artistry of the Mentally Ill* in Germany in 1922), and a dossier of the writings of Adolf Wölfli, the most famous *artiste brut*, compiled by Elka Spoerri, director of the Fondation Wölfli.

If *In the Realms of the Unreal* can be faulted, it would be for quantitative reasons, i.e, mainly for the frustration of having such tiny samplings of so many original works: over 200 pieces by nearly 100 writers in a relatively slim volume. Otherwise, despite the derivative and uneven quality of some of the American material—which I take as a sign of editorial adventurousness in a highly uncharted domain, rather than as a structural fault—this is a book that should proffer revelations, and perhaps produce nightmares, for all.

*

One of the great ironies of modern art history occurred last year in Austria. The prestigious Oskar Kokoschka Prize was awarded to the members of Gugging, which is the artists' collective for mentally ill patients at the psychiatric hospital located just outside of Vienna. Their works can be seen in several recent publications, notably: *L'Art Brut* #12 (Lausanne: Collection de l'Art Brut, 1983); *Künstler aus Gugging* (Bibliotheks und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenberg, 1989); *Portraits From the Outside* (New York: Parsons School of Design, 1990).

Just over a half century ago, Kokoschka's art was compared to the art of the mentally ill in order to reveal the presumed "decadence" of his work, in the infamous *Entartete Kunst* ("Degenerate Art") exhibit organized by the Nazi ministry of culture in Munich in 1937. This exhibition was recently reconstructed at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in a show and excellent catalogue entitled, *Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany*, curated by Stephanie Barron. The original Nazi version of the show attracted record audiences (over two million visitors during its four months in Munich alone), and it was, ironically, one of the great exhibitions of modern art, consisting of over 650 works by such artists as Kirchner, Nolde, Mondrian, Kandinsky, Lissitzky, Marc, Schwitters, Picasso, Klee, Chagall, Ernst, Grosz, Dix, and Kokoschka himself. Wishing to reveal the "degeneracy" of such art by means of comparison with what were deemed overtly "primitive" or "atavistic" works, this show had the added

ironic advantage of being among the first to exhibit comparisons between modernist works and both the art of the insane and tribal art.

The catalogue of the LACMA show is an invaluable historic and aesthetic document: it includes a detailed room-by-room reconstruction of the original Munich show, providing not only information on the artworks, but also recording the accompanying Nazi anti-modernist propaganda; also included is a facsimile reprint with English translation of the pamphlet produced for the Nazi show; and a highly informative essay about the auction of such works in 1939 at the Galerie Fischer in Switzerland—a quirk of fate which saved many masterpieces from destruction. Furthermore, there are several essays about lesser known aspects of the campaign against "degenerate art," notably on music and film in Nazi Germany.

Adolf Ziegler, who organized the Munich show in 1937, opened the exhibition with a speech where he pronounced the following: "All around us you see the monstrous offspring of insanity, impudence, ineptitude, and sheer degeneracy. What this exhibition offers inspires horror and disgust in us all." Considering the increased desire for censorship of the arts, increased anti-intellectualism, and decreased NEA, NEH and university funding in this country, I cannot overestimate the timeliness and importance of this LACMA show, as a critical voice in the struggle against a malignant and catastrophic vision that continues to plague art and thought in our time.

*

The writings of Pierre Klossowski are among the most underrated and unread—especially in this country—of that generation of French intellectuals who formed the basis of what constitutes present day post-structuralist thought. For example, his crucial work on Nietzsche, *Nietzsche et le cercle vicieux*—which influenced Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, and most other major readers of Nietzsche—still hasn't appeared in English translation, twenty years after its publication, and well after many lesser books, not to mention all the major ones, on Nietzsche have appeared.

Yet the situation is slowly changing. Following their translation of Klossowski's novel, *The Baphomet*, Stephen Sartarelli and Sophie Hawkes have just produced excellent translations of the convoluted yet elegant prose of two of Klossowski's long essays, *Diana at her Bath* and *The Women of Rome*, united in one volume (Boston: Eridanos Press, 1990). These difficult texts disclose the central passions behind Klossowski's thought, where theological drama intersects philosophical perversion, and private erotic phantasms collide with mythical exigencies. In *Diana at her Bath*, the theophany of the goddess Diana is explained in terms of the consequences of Actaeon's theological affront: his hubris is the condition

for the goddess' own self-reflection. Yet perhaps the true protagonist of this drama is that daemon who serves as the intermediary between goddess and man, the daemon who "becomes Actaeon's imagination and Diana's mirror." For in this dialectic between the mortal and the divine—two mutually incompatible realms—a third term is necessary to create the impossible desire at the core of this myth. Actaeon's gaze—the daemon's trick—is the condition by which Diana's chastity can be experienced as an accident of the body, and thus become eroticized, an object of desire. Actaeon's tragic fate—transformation into the prey of the huntress, in perfect ironic symmetry with Actaeon's own visual stalking of Diana—is none other than that of all other humans before the might of the gods: an emblematic death.

In *The Women of Rome*, Klossowski—following Bachofen's revelations in his classic study, *Mutterrecht*—investigates certain ancient Roman erotic practices, notably the *floralia*, the erotic stage shows, and the practice of ritual prostitution. Klossowski traces out the metamorphosis from the sacred, hierogamic prostitution rituals of the Asiatic Mother Goddess cults through to the Roman theatrical staging by courtesans of divine adulteries. Roman eroticism is, in fact, a function of progressive desacralization, where mythical themes lose their theological function and become the subject of spectacles—whence the liberation of erotic pleasure, marking a radical transformation in the history of the eroticized body.

—Allen S. Weiss

Benjamin Friedlander, *Time Rations* (O Books, 1991)

I find myself increasingly depressed by the lethargy of poetry, not just "workshop" but avant-, post-, or anything else manicured by the weary art of artlessness, outfitted in prosodic versions of designer-tattered jeans, and above all simpering with a doggy desperation to be liked and petted. It comes as a great edification, then, to find *Time Rations*, which asserts its lyricism slantwise, as through venetian blinds, and is so gratifyingly open about its "Wiggy programs put on step-down / splash-dab miscues of the source." (p. 13)

The book appears with afterbirth intact, placental matter part of the ambient *sense* among the many senses made. So the poems are printed

amidst a cascade of sloughings—dates, places, temperature (Fahrenheit, I presume), dedicatees, even lines with deletions stroked through and question marks adjacent, indicating the limbo of revision as something not so much temporal as spatial, lurking in the precinct of the page, shadowing the text. There is no table of contents or index, so the poems are met as itinerants, palpable in their deficiencies, but alertly ***human,*** salutary in their wanderlust as well as their inertia (which sometimes, on probing, turns out to be stubbornness).

A line across the top of a page (indicating a section break?: so often, the most rudimentary probings in to the nature of *Time Rations* turn quizzicality into a polymathic energy that has no proper object) is followed by a single line of text:

> The poles of my affection made equators everywhere. (p. 49)

The temporal balance of precessional cycles is the ostensible theme of the book, if we could endow "theme" with a mask that would make one think "vertigo." One poem is titled "MY ONLY MODEL IS THE SOLID PANIC LOOSENED IN THE POETRY OF THE ABSOLUTE MASTER, TIME" (p. 12)—a laudable guru, but fellow-travellers of more recognizably human comportment grace the book with a sense of the lived quotidian (companions like Andrew Schelling and Pat Reed, but also an interesting array of explicit mentors, Blackburn, Eigner, Grenier, Howe, McNaughton, Ginsberg, Williams). Friedlander's work nourishes the jottings, doodles, flashes out of which prosodic luminescence is achieved; but he seems committed primarily to the notion that the real poetry inheres in quality of attention; the style of attitude, preparedness; the inclination to be ready, and the satisfaction in being surprised.

> The car with doors open lit up at 4 a.m.
>
> end of the bridge, & the highway
>
> patrolman a boot up on the
>
> bumper, speaking to the moon. . .
>
> It is robotics we derive
> from now, wordlessly. (p.55)

Charles Olson's most implacable, abrupt, and irresistible essay was, fittingly, "The Resistance." Friedlander is an heir of resistance, with this additional burden: that poetry itself must now be resisted, and overcome,

in our engagement with the robotic continuum of mind absorbing body, body absorbing tool, tool absorbing soul. "There is a desisting that becomes heroic / & edges out the comedy of extroverted blabbing." (p. 16) The innovation here is to recognize the persistence of the heroic, but find a comic, not a tragic, destination for heroism as such. Finally, there is a handsome skepticism attending Friedlander's romance of writing, which preserves the seduction of adventure while remaining cogently pragmatic: "Having a table to bear down on won't make life any easier"—to which the retort: "Doing it wrong on purpose, making it stick." (p. 22)

*

W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990)

A beautiful book that elaborates the convergence of cultural eclecticism and social intensities in a decade that, Lhamon complains, has been passed over in favor of the '60s. Lhamon sets out to reclaim the 1950s from the nostalgic retrospection that sees it only as a wasteland with a handful of anomalous supercharged dynamos adrift on its surface, waiting to be plucked back to the future of our culinary-custodial postmodernism. But Lhamon astutely recognizes the minutiae of transgression developing in the '50s by way of passion and discipline rather than, in the conventional view, kicks and inattention. *Deliberate Speed* therefore makes a convincing blend of its diversity of heroes: Ralph Ellison, Jackson Pollock, Chuck Berry, Robert Frank, Miles Davis, Jack Kerouac, Walker Evans, Little Richard, Ornette Coleman garnering the most attention; but the ambiance of the book is derived from well-informed and intimate excursions into innumerable other figures who periodically recur, such as Olson and Ginsberg, Agee and Heller, Monk and Bird, Nicholas Ray and Elia Kazan (and Brando and Dean), Clement Greenberg, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, not to mention the curious but effective prominence of figures from other times, like Eliot, Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Nabokov, and a surprising but altogether relevant detour through Wittgenstein's writing practice as a parable of "deliberate speed" as a way, finally, to wrap the whole bundle up into a squalling knot deposited squarely on the doorstep of Thomas Pynchon, through whom the link with the present is emphatically made in the final chapter.

Lhamon's work is a welcome corrective to conventional surveys (Elvis is barely mentioned, for instance)—not that there are any surprises, but neither is the book burdened by the ideological assertiveness that made Andrew Ross' crisp study, *No Respect* (1989), come across more like a

vendetta than it needed to have been. Both Ross and Lhamon focus on the way the "mass cultural host" could no longer be avoided in the '50s—nor could it be domesticated: it was, after all, the great *domesticator*—but had, to be confronted, addressed from within. The artist had no choice but to be a parasite. Miles Davis' "My Funny Valentine" and Robert Frank's photos celebrate the sheer *difference* of American corn (as did Kerouac in his recording of his spectacular rap on bop), a difference that inaugurated cultural independence more effectively than anything else in the intervening century and a half of political separatism. Lhamon takes *Lolita* as the prolific allegory of that moment when (in Nabokov's words) "luminous globules of gonadal glow. . .travel up the opalescent sides of jukeboxes." "The year *Lolita* appeared in Paris, 1955," Lhamon notices, "was the year McDonald's raised its golden arches in America, the year *Playboy* first printed nude photos." It's a moment when the alignment of sociocultural planets conspired in a sort of conceptual eclipse, which we may still be gliding under the shadow of. As icon of this conjunction I like Lhamon's description of a General Electric ad (again from 1955), showing "Atom man as a smiling giant hygienically costumed in a white jumpsuit with a matching white cowl. He is a priest for a new era, plugging in an atomic power cord for a petite housewife. She wears the generic fifties apron cut to the same pattern as the one Jim Backus wore playing Jim Stark's father in *Rebel Without a Cause* that same year. . . . The two figures are grinning uneasily, doubtless as embarrassed by their costumes as by their subliminal suggestiveness. The picture is of the moment before initiation, sexual or nuclear, when authority is pressing to overcome resistant or nervous reluctance from the innocent partner. As the accompanying text confirms, 'working with the government, private companies have already begun to turn a major source of fear into a major source of fuel. . . . As we see it, this is progress in the American way.'" The prophetic depravity of cognitive fast-forward is our direct link to the 1950s, the legacy of which is exquisitely reflected and engaged in *Deliberate Speed*.

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Ewa Kuryluk, *Veronica and Her Cloth: History, Symbolism and Structure of a "True" Image* (Blackwell, 1991) Claude Gandelman, *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* (Indiana University Press, 1991)

> "He believed that the things inside his body and the things outside his body were having a conversation through a

piece of skin. And he could never tell
to which of the sides his skin actually
belonged . . ."

—Toby MacLennan, *Singing the Stars* (Coach House, 1983)

Skin isn't much attended to—not the way hearing and seeing are, and even tasting and smelling figure more prominently in the various cultural indicators that yammer through the airwaves, or creep up subtly from the dizzy spirals of personal association, accidence, enticement.[1] Maybe this is because, as in MacLennan's fantasy, epidermal association is ambiguously poised at the juncture of inner and outer, self and other, and therefore not readily distinguishable as either specimen or map. By one of those fortuitous coincidences of publication Ewa Kuryluk and Claude Gandelman suddenly offer an embarrassment of riches in their complementary speculations on dermatoid parchments.

A few years ago I spent a long time transfixed at the National Gallery by Hans Memling's tiny oil on board, "Saint Veronica," in which the turbaned lady gingerly dangles an impeccably rendered cloth bearing the luminous image of Christ's face. Memling's painting is reproduced on the dustjacket of Kuryluk's book, which provides all the background (and more) I yearned for in the presence of the image. *Veronica and Her Cloth* is about the extensive iconographic tradition to which Memling contributed. Veronica, the name, splits apart into a label, "vera icon," or true image. Kuryluk peruses the Christian obsession with *acheiropoietoi,* meaning images not rendered by hand, of which the most famous (or infamous) is the bleary shadow on the shroud of Turin. The elaborate gushes and rivulets of such *acheiropoietoi* are chronicled meticulously by Kuryluk, but what makes *Veronica and Her Cloth* compelling are the issues that arise in the process. These have to do with with power of touch, with Christ's heuristic propensity for touching as teaching, and with the haptic feminization of a fledgling mystery religion otherwise similar to the male-dominated cult of Mithra.

Quite apart from the religio-historic thesis and exposition, Kuryluk's book activates some fascinating speculations on the nature of touch as mediated through the ancillary (and sometimes competing) media of skin, cloth, veils and shrouds.[2] It is also an extended rumination on menstruation, through the figure of the Hemorrhissa, the unstaunchable woman whose bleeding stopped at Jesus' touch. Christianity in this context emerges detached from its ecclesiastical fetters, reanimated as a theatre of speculations about male beheading and female bleeding, the relative scales of corporeality adhering to substitute skins, and the power of images rendered in such diverse receptacles as womb, mirror, icon, or cloth. The

dermal substrate of mimesis is fabricated in the mask, which at one level is simply the donning of a second skin, an extra coating of corporeality. But paradoxes flow like menses from the enigmatic viscosity of mirrors and eyeballs; and when the imperturbable gaze of the vanished savior stares out at you through the mimetic jelly of eyes miraculously embossed on cloth, as in Memling's Veronica, the attachment of skin to inner or outer realms is altogether conjectural.

Christ reappears *in extenso* as the vibrating skin of the planetary surface in medieval cartography in *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts*. Gandelman's range, not confined to the specifics of an iconographic tradition, is considerably broader than Kuryluk's. So Borges, Kafka, and Klee filter through Whitman, Holbein and Michaelangelo as if they were all transparencies, or at least permeable to incarnate reflection. Drawing on the 19th century art historian Alois Riegl, Gandelman frames his research according to two styles of visualization, optic and haptic. The distinction is between ocular penetration and haptic touching, as means of self-scrutiny. Optics reduces things to outlines, or into linear configurations in which the skeletal essence gleams through obfuscating matter; while haptics searches depths, plangencies, condensed interiorities in infinitely receding series. The optic mode is engaged in a paradoxical intensification of the human by subtraction, of which the exemplary figure is Kafka's hunger artist. The haptic mode culminates in the reflexive detachment of the flayed skin, in which a corporeal density is inverted and objectified as an enigma of tactility.

Gandelman offers a sumptuous array of visual images from some very arcane sources, and the book is a treat on that account alone. But the images are meant to be interactive with literary texts so that, together, they precipitate a kind of ideographic resonance and, following the implications of the title, we begin to see things in texts we thought we were simply reading, and start to detect palpable inscriptions in images we've merely brushed with our eyes. The winding paths, the stark outlines, of optic trajectory across what Gandelman calls "vectorial" space are complexly amplified by the haptic cutting and pasting of collage and montage.[3] *Reading Pictures, Viewing Texts* can be thought of as an extended meditation on the question, What does showing mean?, and as such intersects with *Veronica and Her Cloth* inasmuch as the iconography always depicts the saint showing us her image. Veronica, "true icon," *shows showing* as she dangles that cloth or extra-dermal skin bearing the imprint of divine incarnation. In the Veronica tradition, showing means holding.

The dream of transparency—the identification of knowledge with vision—needs to be augmented by the haptic experience of vision embedded in flesh, absorbed in a qualifying array of sensations that constitute the tactility of sight and insight. The works by Gandelman and

Kuryluk are enriching speculations in this direction, and welcome correctives to the predominance of "the gaze" as means of thematizing embodiment after the incitements of Foucault and Lacan.[4] The cybernetic modernization of body as flesh+prosthesis quickens to fantasies involving the redistribution of parts, so the question of power can be conveniently displayed in (and abridged as) cyclopean reverie. These oculocentric mythologies derive from the developing "realism" of an eye appended to photographic, telescopic, and microscopic apparatus. So there is no "disembodied eye," but the powerful cultural allure of ocular mobility dramatizing itself in such scenarios as Bataille's phallic eye absorbed in a vagina, the pineal eye of phrenology, the hermetic seal of the pyramidal eye on federal currency, the balloon eye of Redon, the razored eye in Bunuel, and so on—all of which reverberate with the peril of detachment as much as the exhilaration of scopic independence. Reading is not identical to viewing, nor is sight equivalent to the gaze. "Reading" extends from the scrutiny of fleeting intimations in facial expression to the anatomical wiggles of anthropomorphic alphabets; from texture to text; from flesh as the innermost proprioceptive reach of the world to the outermost bag of the soul.

The prodigious realm of fabrics which collect our psychic peregrinations includes not only text and canvas, movie screen and vibrating tympanum of the hi-fi speaker, but our own skins, the "coat of your own self," as Olson puts it, "the beasts / emblazoned on you." The Eleusinian mystery of showing—the arousal of soul into motion—revealed vegetable matter as a woven template of flesh. We're related to *the seen* not by sight but by "sense," if by that we accede to the sensory plenitude of the world as a continuous body, a bodily continuum, a dermal gift, "un solo cuerpo" (Neruda). The "true images" of the Veronica *acheiropoietoi* involve flesh and blood, relating cognition to the eye always with the reminder of the ways eyes also finger and caress their objects and, conversely, the way corporeality as a whole fixes its postural gaze on the ambient world. The "vera icon" speaks of images not made by hand and not seen by the eye, in which the synesthetic options of sense testify to a constant migration of partitions, the pages of a book like a sequence of skins out of which peer the jostling muzzles of an animate alphabet, reflecting the mystery of our extrojected selves known inside out in resoundings of the barometric density of our cultural cumulus.

—Jed Rasula

Notes

[1]Diane Ackerman notes this, in an attempt to compensate somewhat for the misproportion, in her beautifully written *Natural History of the Senses* (Random House, 1990). Didier Anzieu, a French psychoanalyst, has proposed in *The Skin Ego* (Yale, 1989) that we rethink the ego not from the bunker mentality model of the interiorized homunculus, but at the periphery,

the threshold of touch, sensation, identity and difference. He has also developed this concept for aesthetics in *Le Corps de l'oeuvre* (Gallimard, 1981).

[2]There are resonances from vernacular American culture Kuryluk does not take advantage of, like Sam Cooke's song about "touching the hem of his garment"—or innumerable other gospel variants thereof—not to mention the idiomatic expression "Give me some skin!"

[3]Gandelman is hardly the first to note the corporeal implications of modernist methods of text and image production. *Word Cultures*, Robin Lydenberg's fascinating meditation on William Burroughs' cut-ups, for instance, is vitally alert to the dynamics of textual incarnation.

[4]Not that this vein is exhausted. See for instance Jonathan Crary's *Techniques of the Observer* (Zone/MIT, 1990) for an "illuminating" discussion of 19th century physiological speculation, and the epistemological cultivation of the aesthetic subject. Crary offers a most intriguing account of the conceptual background of the emerging scopic drives of the 20th century. A useful meditation on the modern erasure of the animate body as a precondition of robotic invincibility is *Technology as Symptom and Dream* by Robert Romanyshyn (Routledge 1989); a more politically sophisticated exposition of the situation at present is Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (Routledge, 1991).

One of the mishaps of the Derridean critique of phenomenology, I suspect, is that the very substantial ground established by Merleau-Ponty speculations on embodiment (not to mention such German innovators as Plessner and Plügge) has been elided under pressures to politize the topic, resulting in a fixation on the supervisory power of the optic gaze and the penal model of the opticon (the optic icon!) as the figure of modernity. In recent years, the most vigorous and comprehensive meditation—and I stress the term—on the issue of embodiment that I'm aware of has been undertaken by David Michael Levin, not suprisingly following phenomenological precedent, in *The Body's Recollection of Being*, *The Opening of Vision* and *The Listening Self* (all Routledge: 1985, 1988, 1989).

John Matthias, *A Gathering of Ways* (Athens, Ohio: Swallow Press / Ohio University Press, 1991)

In 1976 Dr. Henry Chadwick suggested the very real possibility that Priscillian of Avila is buried at Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. Priscillian's distinction is to have been the first schismatic and heretic executed by secular authorities at the insistence of orthodox Christian churchmen. He died, historians say, in 365. By the early seventh century a cult—Priscillianism—was established with Compostela as its center. Chadwick may have unearthed one of the more spectacular ironies in ecclesiastical history, for Compostela is famous today, and has been famous since the ninth century, for being the resting place not of Priscillian but of St. James. After Theodimer's rediscovery of the cult site in the ninth century, Compostela became the destination of pilgrims. So we have one cult on top

of another, the irony being that the church consolidated its political authority on the dust of a Gnostic! Everyone was swindled by the rumor of James in Spain. Even the enemy knew that something was special about Santiago de Compostela. In 997 Almanzor stormed into Galicia and carried off the bells of Compostela—to Córdoba—in a calculated affront to one of Christian Spain's most holy places.

In 1987 John Matthias trudged several of the "glory roads" on the way to Compostela, never quite reaching it, and went off to write a poem about pilgrimages and journeying, myth, history, and place. He is, of course, not the first poet to be fascinated by the clotted gore and intellectual and architectural monuments of the Middle Ages. Pound and Eliot appear in the poem, on their walking tour of Provence, just as in the first of the book's three poems about routes, rivers, and roads, Edward Thomas is heard from while annotating the Icknield Way. (In the second poem a partly apocryphal history of the Midwest is the subject matter.) It's the third poem, on the roads to Compostela, that seems to me the most successful, for there the writing is impressive, even if sometimes its Poundian moments summon a shadow that dwarfs Matthias. Though I don't know this for sure, I suspect that Matthias has been called "Poundian" before, but screw the new if we can at least have some level of competence. While Matthias makes much of the fact that *trobar* means "to find" and mentions in one of his endnotes that this journey to Compostela restored his physical and spiritual health, the poem is most interesting for the splendor of its language—a very special if limited pleasure in the sonority of vowels and consonants arranged in a manner not altogether unfamiliar. I don't mean to sound as if I'm apologizing for his technique: what's not familiar these days? If I believed that such categories meant much any more, I'd call this writing, at its best moments, good minor poetry. Matthias has borrowed much beyond technique from Pound (and David Jones) as he pursues the spirit of place, but I suppose his own sense of history as it is entangled in geography and myth might be seen by some as colored by a kind of antiquarianism. Matthias acknowledges problems of textuality between us and the sore feet of the tenth century. But it is never altogether clear—to me at least—why any of this history matters to him. Perhaps the endnote about his own condition is a pertinent gloss? Perhaps he is, like Pound, in pursuit of the light of Eleusis? Perhaps it is the sheer strangeness and fragility of his historical material that fascinates him. Unfortunately he resorts at times to images that rather predictably point to cultural and historical decline. Is this Spengler revisited? Pound knew that tune. All roads have their Shell and Burger King. I know it too. They're right up my street. But sometimes I *need* gas.

*

Nathaniel Tarn, *Seeing America First* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1989)

If the date of publication is accurate, Tarn's book is two years old now. Has it received the accolades it deserves? I'll admit that in what I'd seen of his work before this book I'd been more impressed by Tarn's erudition than by his writing. Not so in the six "narratives" framing the rest of this book's poems. These are not really narrative poetry at all but long meditative lyrics powerful enough to give me hope that the genre is not altogether extinct or hackneyed. Their rhythms and syntactical structures are prosaic, conversational, and yet finally more accomplished than much of more adventuresome poetry. The "Rectangles" that are the bulk of the book are a kind of prose poetry hammered into visual shape. I don't see how they would lose much in other shapes. Besides the "Rectangles" and the "Narratives" there is a sequence at the book's center called "Persephone West," an almost surreal reworking of the myth in California. A few of the "Rectangles" seem little more than ruminative journal entries, which is how (I confess) much of Tarn's poetry before *Seeing America First* has struck me.

What does Tarn believe? About how many other of the hordes of poets frozen in the polemics of one or another post-modernism would such a question even make sense? He believes, it seems, in parallel worlds:

> The substance of the vision is that we are not
> living in the true, aboriginal, archaeological time
> and are not, in fact living in true space either.
> This is something we have here which was once true time
> and space, but now no longer so. We have imposed on things
> our mental grids, first and foremost: time and space.
> Divining this to be a fault, we have then declared
> that, in the truth of it, all ours is relative
> whereas the absolute: it has no time / no space!
> Survive as best we can with this dichotomy, perpetually
> trying to get ourselves out of our time into the "timeless."
> But the true time flows out there unimpeded, just alongside
> our world; the true space, likewise, stretches, boundless,
> over the universe—but it does *stretch*,
> it does not vanish in some "no space," "Not this / not that,"
> some "neither / nor" our teachers sell us.

This is visionary poetry which refuses transcendence. The gigantic calm of Tarn's work rests in his ability to reconcile us to the *dream* of paradise:

Friends: we think we have long since outlived the dream
But we are constantly outliving the dream
and yet the dream remains alive with an enormous life.

Difficult to excerpt these long poems without making Tarn seem didactic, which he is not. The sense of beneficence (however illusory, however circumscribed by the language that writes the silence Tarn pursues) one gets reading this book should not make us overlook its wit. In one "rectàngle" Tarn has been watching a parade of extinct American cars:

Adios European time! Parthenike, Virgine!
Arms up, pits bare, brand name on buttock
short breasts flattened like blasted buds
mortal, in the explosion of her humanity:
kiss America's ass: not designed to last!

Caustic and reassuring, Tarn's "voices" are remarkably various—Buddha sitting down with Baudrillard.

—Keith Tuma

Canto General, Pablo Neruda, translated by Jack Schmitt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991) 400 pp.

Canto general is the work in which Pablo Neruda finalized his identity as a completely political poet. In the late forties, while he was in the midst of writing it, he was already a major figure in Chilean politics, a senator, a presidential power broker, and the campaign manager for Gonzalez Videla, who was elected President. After Videla backed away from his former allies, the Communists, eventually outlawing them, Neruda became Videla's chief accuser, and had to flee Chile for his life. *Canto general* was finished just before Neruda escaped over the Andes, eventually making it to Europe.

Two decades later Neruda devoted the first half of his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize to an evocation of this escape. The trip was quite harsh and dangerous on occasion. Neruda was led along faint mountain

trails by four machete-wielding cowboys, who at one point deposited some coins in an ox-skull that stood as a communal piggy-bank in an isolated meadow and then did a silent dance around it.[1]

In another reminiscence, Neruda describes the conclusion of the trip:

> In Paris. . . . Picasso was waiting for me. . . . During these days a Peace Congress was being celebrated in Paris. I showed up there at the last minute to read some of my poems. Everyone applauded and embraced me.[2]

Presidential politics, mountain wilderness, mountaineers and ox-skulls, Paris, Picasso and the Nobel Prize—to evoke the cultural space traversed, one could think of Pound in the late thirties and forties, venerating strong mountain wheat (if not the people who grew it), speaking for Mussolini, going to Washington in an attempt to talk Roosevelt out of opposition to fascism, ending up caged in Pisa. But Pound's cultural sorties were hideously solipsistic, where Neruda's were part of a movement that was effective enough to trigger US intervention in Chile in 1973.

Besides enhancing Neruda's stature as a cultural figure, the drama leading to his escape permeates the writing of the poem, which is absolutely politicized. But to say this does not mean that it is not also "poetic." For Neruda, political poetry did not involve any curtailment of subject matter; the adjective in *Canto general* indicates the domain claimed: everything. In fact, given Neruda's Marxism, for a poem to be truly political it would have to deal with everything. In practice this means a poetic history of South America beginning with an oceanic prehistory:

> Before the wig and the dress coat
> there were rivers, arterial rivers:
> there were cordilleras, jagged waves where
> the condor and the snow seemed immutable [13]

following through the formation of South American nation-states to the specifics of Chilean politics in the late forties and ending the particularity of Neruda writing:

> here I leave
> my *Canto general* written
> on the run, singing beneath
> the clandestine wings of my country.
> Today, 5 February, in this year
> of 1949, in Chile, in "Godemar

de Chena," a few months before
I turned forty-five. [400]

For the story of a continent's history to end at the point of the fugitive-narrator's pen implies a tremendous confidence in the poet's place in history and the poem's efficacy. Neruda's confidence seems justified. His uniting of populism with high-cultural centrality might well be the envy of poets writing in English. Yeats is a somewhat comparable figure, but Neruda's allegiance to the peasantry was based on their economic needs not the piquancy of their language and myths; and he certainly did not venerate the aristocracy as Yeats did. Whitman is the literary model in English that Neruda was most strongly influenced by, but to make the two poets comparable, one must imagine a Whitman who had genuine political power and immediate appeal for his contemporaries. In the following lines, Neruda seems to be consciously reversing the dynamics of "Song of Myself": the poet doesn't include the masses, he is included in them.

To all, to all,

. . . .
to blue Indians on the shores
of lakes sparkling like glass,
to the shoemaker who at this very hour questions,
nailing leather with ancient hands,
to you, to the one who unknowingly has awaited me,
I belong and acknowledge and sing. [286]

"At this very hour" also reverses the poet's position in history. Whitman ends "Song of Myself" as a wraith calling to a future reader who, like the poet, is solitary.

While Neruda's career demonstrates a cultural size beyond anything in English, the actual writing in *Canto general* is not so capacious. There is invective, exhortation, reportage, and evocation of both history and myth, but not much range in style:

That blue jungle was a grotto,
and in the mystery of tree and darkness
the Guarani sang like
mist that rises in the afternoon,
water upon foliage,
rain on a day of love,
sadness beside the rivers. [26]

[Videla:] Wretched clown, miserable
mixture of monkey and rat, whose tail
is combed with a gold pomade on Wall Street,
it won't be long before you fall from your tree
and become the pile of conspicuous filth
that pedestrians will bypass on the street corners! [201]

As I write my left hand reproaches me.
It tells me: why name them, what are they, what meaning
have they? Why not leave them in their anonymous winter
mud, in the mud that horses urinate?
And my right hand answers: "I was born
to pound on doors, to clench blows,
to light the uttermost shadows
where poisonous spiders feed."
They shall be named. Homeland, you didn't grant me
the sweet privilege of naming just
your flowers and foam,
. . . .
with milk and flesh you gave me the syllables
that will also name the pale worms
that crawl in your womb, [330]

Neruda's political function as a poet is to name and to expand on the attributes of what he's naming. He does this in a consistent style ranging from tender elementalness ("with milk and flesh you gave me the syllables") to simple metaphor ("poisonous spiders"). This makes the translator's task relatively easy. Jack Schmitt for the most part has produced a readable and accurate version, though there are a number of awkward line breaks (which don't seem to reflect the original), and on occasion the tone is way off: "I made lunch for the kiddies and left" [250]; "I defended the patrimony of the people who were mine own" [308].

But the specifics of the translation are not that crucial here. The more important issues are whether what Neruda writes as poetry can be translated, and how effective his forms of political/poetic naming are for contemporary American poets. I have to confess that many of these four hundred pages were more of a chore to read than Neruda's reputation would have predicted. To some extent that is because the unfolding of history has rendered the accuracy of his naming rather suspect:

Stalin erects, cleans, builds, fortifies,
preserves, ponders, protects, nourishes,
but he punishes too.

And that's what I wanted to tell you, comrades:
punishment is needed. [253]

But the more basic problem, for me at least, is with the elemental, timeless words: the *foams, flowers, darks, milks, cups, breads, nights, oceans, stars, dews, sands, crystals.* These form a ground base of plenitude against which Neruda sets his denunciations and ironies. The satires remain powerful, and, unfortunately, quite up-to-date:

When the trumpet blared everything
on earth was prepared
and Jehovah distributed the world
to Coca-Cola Inc., Anaconda,
Ford Motors and the other entities [179]

But the continual evocation of an achieved totality beyond history registers for me simply as "poetry":

The cup, universal cavity of water,
trembles with your salt and honey,
and nothing lacks in you as it does
in the flayed crater, the savage vessel [338]

In America today such cups trembling with salt and honey, or variations thereof, exist in numerous poems, where, rather than evoking universality, they enclose themselves in an enclave of cultural specialization.

But Neruda most passionately was not a specialist, and he heaps scorn on poets who he feels do not write in history: "Gidists, / intellectuals, Rilkists, / mistificators, false existentialist / sorcerers, surrealist / butterflies burning / in a tomb" [166-7]. This last image probably wouldn't have been available to Neruda without the Surrealists, who undoubtedly influenced Neruda's early, metaphor-crammed work. The populism, essentialism, and willed simplicity of Neruda's middle and later poetry has been a real historical force; but I doubt whether such a poetic stance contains enough power and accuracy to work in America in the nineties.

In the section entitled, "Let the Woodcutter Awaken," Neruda describes America:

I love the farmer's little house. Recent mothers sleep
scented like tamarind syrup, the linens
freshly ironed. Fire
burns in a thousand homes ringed with onions.
(When the men sing at the riverside they have

a hoarse voice like stones from the riverbed. . . .
It's your peace we love, not your mask. [256]

However accurate Neruda's report was in the forties, and it is hard to imagine that such lines ever reflected much reality, today things are reversed: the clean farmers in a clean, providential landscape are one of America's principal masks.

The introduction states that Jack Schmitt has become something of a transplanted Chilean in order to translate Neruda authentically.[3] Previous translators of Neruda such as Alastair Reid and John Felstiner have made similar journeys. On the one hand, of course, this is a useful enterprise, as the self-defined centrality of English speakers always needs information from what that centrality names "the margins." But while one can retrace Neruda's steps and breathe a belated version of his air, one cannot change the climate of reception in America today, where pictures of authenticity are a major meta-commodity, central to the sales of insurance, beer, baseball, and, if one wants to push things far enough, the Pentagon and CIA budgets.

Neruda was unambiguously an enemy of false totalizations—of imperialism in other words. But *Canto general* is not free of its own totalized view of history, one which at times seems premature and forced. So, in many places, the poem needs to be read with grains of (non-elemental) salt.

—Bob Perelman

Notes

[1]See Pablo Neruda, *Passions and Impressions* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), pp 381-4.

[2]Rene de Cosa, *The Poetry of Pablo Neruda* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), p. 118.

[3]Pablo Neruda, *Canto general*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), see page 12.

NOTICINGS

First off, congratulations to Keith and Rosmarie Waldrop, of Burning Deck, who, with the publication of Barbara Guest's *The Countess from Minneapolis* and Julie Kalendek's *The Fundamental Difference*, have

completed their third decade of publishing hand-printed contemporary poetry. How many books must they have printed? 300? Given the fact that both editors have full careers as poets and translators, this publishing service to the community of poetry is truly extraordinary. In every generation, there are a handful of people who make the transmission of poetry possible—as Michael Palmer has written: "without Burning Deck and a very few others, experimental poetry would, simply, not exist."

In *The Discovery of the Art of the Insane*, John M. MacGregor has written the first history of the art of the insane, beginning with a discussion of the situation of the mentally ill in the 1700s, as well as the later Romantic obsession with the insane as visionary heroes (which we still honor, without yet understanding much about it). MacGregor's well-researched work (studded with amazing paintings and drawings, and handsomely produced by Princeton University Press) moves through Surrealism (some astute distinctions between Artaud and Dali, for example), Jean Dubuffet and l'Art Brut, which over the past couple decades has broadened into Outsider Art. I was disappointed to find no work by or discussion of Schroeder Sonnenstern, whom Edouard Roditi has championed as one of the greatest of the Surrealists.

Like others of my generation, I first discovered the work of Norman O. Brown in the mid-1960s, upon the publication of the second book of his now completed trilogy: *Life Against Death* (1959), *Love's Body* (1966), and *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis* (University of California Press, 1991). Constellating literature, philosophy, history, psychology, and politics, Brown is our greatest living theorist, a writer of the same amplitude, if different directions, as Arnold Hauser and Northrop Frye. Brown's break with the discursive, systematic form of *Life Against Death* in *Love's Body* indicated that he had found a way to practice "poetry" as "the scholar's art" (Wallace Stevens). In that book, subject-oriented chapters ("Liberty," "Trinity," "Nature," etc.) processed facets of an ongoing argument as it passed through their domains, in quote-packed stanza-like paragraphs. *Love's Body* moves as poetic intuition, with precise, analytical cores rippling out, fusing and/or interacting, so that realized feedback and Brown's own insights braid into a multi-currented serial structure. With the new book, the trilogy looks like Brown's "divine comedy," in which *Apocalypse and/or Metamorphosis*, utilizing styles and formats from both previous volumes, becomes a kind of thinking man's paradise. Brown's brief reply to Herbert Marcuse's critique of *Love's Body*, in the March 1967 *Commentary*, deserves to be reprinted (along with other uncollected talks, notes, and essays). Here is a paragraph from it:

> From politics to poetry. Legislation is not politics, nor philosophy, but poetry. Poetry, art, is not an epiphenomenal reflec-

> tion of some other (political, economic) realm which is the "real thing"; nor a sublimation of something else which is the "real," carnal "act." Poetry, art, imagination, the creator spirit is life itself; the real revolutionary power to change the world; and to change the human body. To change the human body: here is the crisis, *hic Rhodus, hic salta;* which, as Hegël said, is to be translated "here is the Rose, here begin to dance." To begin to dance; who can tell the dancer from the dance; it is the impossible unity and union of everything.

If Brown was a major discovery of the 1960s, Weston LaBarre's *The Ghost Dance* (recommended by Gary Snyder for its chapter on Paleolithic cave art) was a similar largesse in the mid-1970s. In 1985, LaBarre (born 2 years earlier than Brown, in 1911) published a kind of annex to the 676 page *The Ghost Dance*, called *Muelos: A Stone Age Superstition about Sexuality* (Columbia University Press—I recently discovered the book in a discount catalog). In 140 pages, LaBarre tracks the longevity and ramifications of this superstition from the oldest rituals we are aware of, in the Upper Paleolithic, through Christian, Renaissance, and Victorian history. He summarizes this complex in the following way:

> Bones are given by the male parent, and bones can magically reconstitute the whole animal. As the main storehouse of bone marrow, the brain is the source of semen, via the spinal cord. The supply is limited. The fertility of the head is assimilated to cosmic fertility of the sun, rain, lightning. Fire, light, lightning, and seed are all aspects of the same holy male mystery. The fertility of humans, wild animals, and fields can be increased by collecting severed human heads. Fat-marrow and bones are appropriate sacrifice to the immortal spirits, the eternal gods. Immortality also consists in the "continence" of muelos-seed, achieved in various ways. Adult manhood is not the result of endogenous forces but must be obtained from outside through a variety of methods, including homosexual acts. Virility is secreted with semen, in all ejaculation of whatever kind; virility can thus on occasion be made a gift. Loss of manhood, power, and ultimately life itself results from the "spending" of the life-force, which is a finite capital.

Like the Waldrops, Cid Corman has served the community of poetry, as publisher, editor, and translator, for some 40 years. Here I will only touch on some of his contributions before passing on to what might be the most

unusual "selected poems" ever assembled. Corman started *origin* magazine in 1951, and was the first to offer a significant amount of pages to Olson, Creeley, Bronk, and Zukofsky, to name 4 of the now major figures who, when they appeared in *origin*, hardly appeared elsewhere. Corman is also an odyssean letter writer and his correspondence with Olson, like Olson's with Dahlberg, is a dark spectacle of mentor/apprentice strife; it is available in Olson's version, *Letters for Origin* (which does not include Corman's end of it), and in George Evans' Corman/Olson version, *The Complete Correspondence, 1951-1964. origin* has appeared in 4 series, a total of 74 issues, spanning (with some breaks) 31 years. The first 2 series (34 issues) are brilliantly edited and taught me, among others, how to edit a literary magazine. The last 2 series are less formidable, as over the years Corman has narrowed and purified his view of what is significant in American poetry (he has always been more open to the new, the experimental, in foreign poetries).

Corman is also one of the finest translators of his time. His work with Susumu Kamaike on Bashō is the greatest translation ever done of haiku poetry (*Back Roads to Far Towns*, now a White Pine Press reprint). He was one of the first, or *the* first, to translate and publish translations of Artaud, Celan, Sanesi, Scotellaro, du Bouchet, Daumal, Daive, Ponge, Jaccottet, and Kusano Shimpei. He has also done many pages of Montale, Char, Perse, Dadelsen, Hitomaro, Chuang-Tzu, and recently, Philippe Denis. While there is understandable variation in quality, the over-all quality is probably as high as any poet-translator of this century. In many instances, Corman's versions are the only available—though "available" must be qualified, as 80% of his published translations remain in issues of *origin*. Someone, obviously, should do a 500 page Corman Selected Translations.

Corman's career as a poet is more difficult for me to assess. Over the past 40 years he has published more than 60 collections, many of them quite tiny, with only a few (such as *Sun Rock Man* and *Livingdying*, New Directions books) widely distributed. Under these conditions, Lapis Press's 1990 boxed two-volume *Of*, beautifully produced with bold calligraphy by Sam Francis, is certainly welcome. It comes to 1500 pages, and one opens it expecting to find a lifetime's work. It turns out that *Of* represents a selection from, roughly, the first two-fifths of Corman's career. I say "roughly" as one must guess: there is no chronological or previous publication information offered. As an old Corman reader I know that many of the poems have appeared before, some in *origin*, and some in contexts—Corman's years in Matera, Italy, the subject of *Sun Rock Man*—that are damaged when excerpted from, especially when the poems are not identified as a section from an earlier book.

For a first time reader, the presentation must be baffling and overwhelming. Each volume contains 5 sections (based, I believe, on Noh play

categories), and each begins with a welter of translations (fragments as well as entire poems), out of which Corman's own poetry appears to rise (clouds of dust on the horizon, out of which a single rider is seen). The relation of author to author's translated texts is shockingly complicated by the fact that all of the translations are treated as Corman poems—at no point are Homer, Sophocles, Catullus, Tao Ch'ien, Villon, Rimbaud, Mallarme, Bashō, Rilke, Ungaretti, Char, Montale, Celan, Artaud, Scotellaro, and Lorine Niedecker(!) identified as original authors (and these are just the ones I noticed—I am sure there are more). Wanting to be fair in bringing this matter up in a review, I wrote Corman. Since his response is pretty astonishing, I will quote it at length:

> When Sam Francis first called me, from Tokyo, almost exactly 4 years ago—the first words were: "Cid—I want to do all your work!" And my reply, pronto: "Sam—you don't know what you're saying: I'm the most productive poet in human history (the fact)." Anyway it prompted *Of:* which was never, despite catalogue, given out as a "selected poems"—tho any book of mine cd be called that. ALL my books are edited with a care, unique I suspect, in the annals of poetry. It took me 6 years to EDIT: SUN ROCK MAN. But when I did Volume I—even before I completed it—I realized it had to be 2 volumes—and then when I had done the 2—and Sam was mulling the printing of them—slowly—I realized the book (ONE BOOK) had to be 5 volumes. And that's what it will be. (No PATERSON or MAX or CANTOS biz.) Each volume about the same size, about 750pp. That represents less than one half percent of my work—and that's putting it on the heavy side. (On my desk—I plan to photograph it in due time—the mss towards the final 3 vols are piled up. If they were in a single pile they wd reach literally from the desktop to the ceiling of this room. Jap. ceilings, as you know, aint very high. 1000s of poems. And these represent already a culling. From which the 3 vols. will come.)
>
> The work will have covered, in effect, some 50 years of writing. And the book works in ways that are unique. Despite the ultimate 3500pp—the book reads, as you can already see, "easily" (my poems, of course, tending to be short). And even a child wd find much pleasure. Once you have read thru—got the feel of how it goes—you can open anywhere and read backwards or forwards. The opening sections are always Others' work. This is equally true of earlier books of mine—though very few seem to notice. . . If I had published *Of* (by

> myself, as I will be doing these final 3 vols) my name wdntve appeared in the book or on it at all (apart from being another character in it: even you are in it). It draws on all literature and everyone I know or have known who has touched me in one way or another: I'm simply (as Blake knew and I think you know too) the medium.
>
> Identifications are easy to work out: I give ample cues, when they are not outright. But they are NOT essential. The words are. . . I'm not testing the reader, or critic: I never test anyone—not by my style: I just offer the best I know. In the best way I can. As I've often said: If you can improve any work of mine by changing a single word or comma etc—go to it—and you are free to claim the poem as your own. I can't be stolen from: all is given.

Well. If this "ONE BOOK" of 3500 pages represents less than one half percent of Corman's poetry (over 50 years, going back to before 1940, when Corman was 15 years old), this puts the total production at over 700,000 pages, or 14,000 pages a year, or 40 pages a day. If this is so, Corman must not only be the most productive poet in human history—he must also be the first to write non-stop for 50 years, including while eating and asleep. The underside of Corman's claim is of course that no one knows or can know. I wonder if Little Joe Gould is trying to get our attention from the grave. . .

If Corman does issue the next 3 volumes anonymously, some of the apparent hubris will be taken care of. However, his justifications don't bear scrutiny. He knows very well that signing one's own name to the work of others was not what Blake had in mind when he wrote that the authors were in eternity. Blake signed his own name to all of the art and writing that he self-produced. The thought that one would find in a Blake collection, via Corman's logic, poems by Chaucer and Milton presented as Blake's own is unimaginable. Blake meant that he was the medium through which poetry spoke; not the poet who erased other authors' names as their poems passed through his editing into his own book. Corman also evades the issue by offering us the right to change and then claim as our own his (own?) poems. Gee, thanks, Cid—are we to be grateful for this license? He must think we can't write our own poems as he presumably can. As a matter of fact, in publicity copy that Corman offered Lapis Press, he did include his own name and identified the "book" as "poems selected from a lifetime and reaching beyond." Does this mean poems from the other side? Or poems by other poets?

Furthermore, there are no attempts at cues or identifications other than what the contents of the translations themselves offer. Perhaps Corman has

in mind letters from Bronk and Samperi that are cut into Corman stanzas/poems and that, at the end, include the original letter-writers' names. Private letters have become objects d'art "of" Cid Corman. What, basically, is the point in a translator usurping authorship? As a matter of fact, I don't think anonymous publication solves this problem. Corman by this act presumes that original author and reader should be unconcerned with who made what art. He wants us to believe that we are egotistic in expecting author identification, and that, in taking all other authors' names off their work, in his book, but his own (or even with his own), that he is not.

In *Sulfur* #30 I'll try to address Corman's poetry in *Of.*

—Clayton Eshleman

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Nomadic Trajectory (Guernica) and *Isthmus* (Litoral). PAUL VIOLI'S most recent book is *Likewise* (Hanging Loose). ALLEN S. WEISS'S *Shattered Forms: Art Brut, Phantasms, Modernism*, is forthcoming from The State University of New York Press. DEAN YOUNG'S second book of poems, *Beloved Infidel*, will be published by Wesleyan University Press, spring, 1992.

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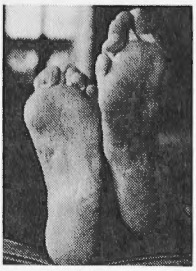

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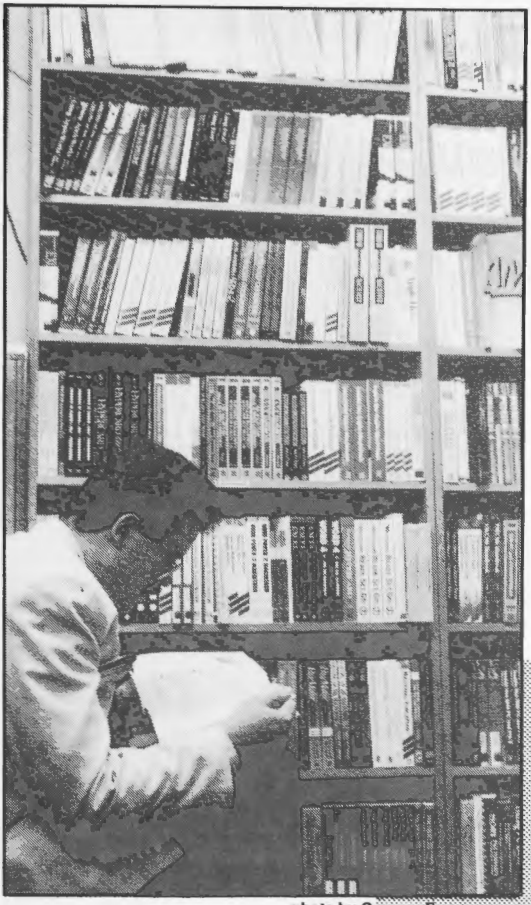

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